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Capacity and complementarity in the Rohingya response in Bangladesh

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Acronyms

BNP	Bangladesh National Party
CCNF	Cox's Bazar Civil Society Organisation-Non-Government Organisation Forum
CERF	Central Emergency Response Fund
COAST	Coastal Association for Social Transformation Trust
CXB	Cox's Bazar
DC	District Coordinator
DEC	Disasters Emergency Committee
DRR	Disaster risk reduction
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
HAG	Humanitarian Advisory Group
HPG	Humanitarian Policy Group
HRW	Human Rights Watch
IDA	International Development Association
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ISCG	Inter-Sector Coordination Group
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
LNGO	Local non-governmental organisation
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
NAHAB	National Alliance of Humanitarian Actors in Bangladesh
NIRAPAD	Network for Information, Response and Preparedness Activities on Disasters
NNGO	National non-governmental organisation
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
RRRC	Rohingya Relief and Repatriation Commission

SEG	Strategic Executive Group
UMN	Undocumented Myanmar National
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WASH	Water, sanitation and hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme

1 Introduction

Following the large-scale forced displacement of Rohingya people from Myanmar in 2017, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh is now host to over 900,000 Rohingya and the largest and densest refugee settlement in the world (UNHCR, 2018a: 25). The scale and speed with which the Rohingya fled Myanmar has not been seen since the Rwanda genocide (The Economist, 2017), and Bangladeshi and international stakeholders have been left struggling to address escalating needs. As the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, has said, 'Despite every effort by those on the ground, the massive influx of people seeking safety rapidly outpaced capacities to respond' (UN News, 2017). This report explores issues of capacity and complementarity as the response in Bangladesh unfolded in the weeks and months following the arrival of Rohingya refugees in 2017.

While this report focuses on Bangladesh, it explores issues situated within a broader humanitarian policy context, including localisation.¹ While local actors have always played a critical role in humanitarian action and discourse (Smillie, 2001), the World Humanitarian Summit in 2015 and resulting Grand Bargain (UN, 2016a) marked a turning point in which localisation shifted from a focus of discussion to an agreed objective. Central questions associated with the localisation agenda revolve around identifying what capacity is needed to respond to humanitarian crises, who has it, and how international, national and local stakeholders can harness this capacity and work together in complementarity. In this report, we argue that, rather than focusing on technical assessments of capacity and partnership, greater attention should be paid to the factors that enable or undermine capacity in humanitarian response (including funding, perceptions of risk and trust, and politics). The report discusses issues that are part of an evolving debate, with local and international stakeholders still trying to work out

what it means to make humanitarian action 'as local as possible, as international as necessary' in practice.²

1.1 Defining key terms

In this paper, we will be using the term 'local and national humanitarian actors' (LNHAs), as used in a recent Oxfam report (2018) on humanitarian funding flows to local actors in Bangladesh. This is intended to reflect the variety and complexity of the various organisations and individuals working in Cox's Bazar. This includes civil society organisations and human rights-based entities that may not necessarily identify themselves as humanitarian, but are nonetheless contributing to the humanitarian response to Rohingya refugees. The term LNHA is also useful in overcoming the often complex distinctions between 'local' and 'national' non-governmental organisations, as well as acknowledging responders that may not belong to formal entities.

There is considerable debate around which stakeholders are considered or referred to as local. In this paper we refer to Bangladeshi stakeholders as LNHA's because the Rohingya have sought refuge in Bangladesh, the Bangladesh state leads the refugee response, and Bangladeshi communities in Cox's Bazar are also 'affected populations'. While framing Bangladeshi stakeholders as 'local' in the refugee response reflects the role of the Bangladesh state as the host country, it does not negate that, from the perspective of the Rohingya, a truly local response would involve Rohingya people. The implications of the use of the term 'local' in displacement settings is discussed further in the conclusion.

Despite longstanding, persistent discussion, there is no universal definition of what capacity means in

1 Defined by the Humanitarian Advisory Group et al. (2017: 3) as 'A process of recognising, respecting and strengthening the independence of leadership and decision-making by national actors in humanitarian action, in order to better address the needs of affected populations.'

2 It is important to recognise this slogan has been contested; as Van Brabant and Patel (2018a: 20) write 'At surface level this is an attractive slogan, in practice this phrase is seen to be problematic; local/national actors and international ones tend to have fairly different assessments of what the right proportion of the response should be attributed to each. With the power of the purse, it is typically the views of the international actors that prevails. This approach also misses a key point; it is less about whether international actors are present or not, and more about how they are present.' The latter issue is explored in our discussion of complementarity.

the humanitarian sector (Few et al., 2015; Scott et al., 2015; Barbelet, 2018; see Kamstra, 2017 for a discussion of defining capacity in the development sector). This research project aims to shed more light on different understandings of capacity. While understandings of capacity emerging from this research are explored later in the paper, the following definition of capacity in the humanitarian sector – as the potential or actual contribution of an actor or an organisation to alleviating the suffering of affected populations – provides a broad point of departure for discussion. Capacity in the humanitarian sector can be broken down into different categories:

- organisational capacity, which refers to the more formal, institutional aspect of an organisation, its policies and processes, in particular with regards to financial management, human resources, and procurement, as well as the means available to an organisation, be it financial (level of funding), logistical (number of cars, motorbikes), assets (offices, computers), or human resources (number of full-time employees);
- operational capacity, which refers to the ability to access affected populations, to deliver good-quality programmes, to analyse and understand the needs of affected population etc.;
- technical capacity, which refers to the technical expertise to carry out interventions such as installing boreholes, or constructing shelter;
- and finally the capacity to uphold sector standards such as humanitarian principles, do no harm, etc.

Given the lack of agreement on how to define capacity, the act of assessing the capacity of humanitarian responders is fraught with power dynamics and potential bias, and this study does not endeavour to quantify the capacity of different stakeholders in Bangladesh. Instead, this paper explores the various ways stakeholders view their own capacity and that of others, presenting evidence of the extent to which capacity among stakeholders in humanitarian response exists at different levels, has changed over time and in response to specific crises, and is linked to power, politics, and various forms of capital.

This paper also explores issues around complementarity. Definitions of ‘complementarity’ differ, but its basic meaning across a range of social and natural sciences describes a division of labour built on comparative advantage (Poole, 2014; Zyck and Krebs, 2015). Yet in a specifically humanitarian response, this term is incomplete. Complementarity necessitates a mutual understanding of each other’s capacities in order to combine them for the most

effective humanitarian response. We therefore propose a working definition of complementarity as ‘an outcome where all capacities at all levels – local, national, regional, international – are harnessed and combined in such a way that plays to the strengths of the individual organisations in order to support the best humanitarian outcomes for affected communities’ (Barbelet, 2018).

Finally, respective states take issue with the term ‘Rohingya refugees’ (Myanmar refuses to use or allow the term ‘Rohingya’, and Bangladesh uses the term ‘forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals’ instead of refugees), and stakeholders involved in the response often acquiesce to the use of such alternative language. In this report, we refer to the Rohingya people in Bangladesh as Rohingya refugees. This terminology is of fundamental importance in describing the Rohingya in Bangladesh, a stateless population who have been subjected to crimes against humanity and potentially genocide (Green et al., 2015), who would clearly satisfy the criteria for refugee status under international law.

1.2 Research topic and case study selection

This case study is part of a larger, two-year research project titled ‘As local as possible, as international as necessary: understanding capacity and complementarity in humanitarian response’. The project seeks to gain insights into how capacity is understood in the humanitarian sector; what capacity exists among local, national and international actors in specific contexts; and what incentives, power structures, and relationships promote or inhibit better collaboration and complementarity. The central questions guiding this research are: How can capacity and complementarity be better understood and applied to support more efficient and effective humanitarian response? What are the opportunities for and obstacles to harnessing the capacity of and forging more effective complementarity among local, national, regional and international actors responding to humanitarian crises? In the Bangladesh case study, we contextualised these questions by exploring issues of capacity and complementarity in the response to Rohingya refugees and severe weather or climate-related disasters in Cox’s Bazar.

Bangladesh was selected as a case study for three key reasons. First, it is experiencing a large-scale refugee crisis, one that had been unfolding

at scale for six months when fieldwork was conducted between February–April 2018 and will likely become protracted (Wake and Yu, 2018). Second, studying Bangladesh enables us to look at localisation in the context of a government that has shown strong national leadership in responding to the crisis, alongside a vibrant civil society and LNHA who are vocal about localisation. Third, Bangladesh is experiencing significant poverty and regular disasters. The perception of national capacity to respond to disasters is generally positive, while improvement has been noted in development and poverty alleviation, prompting us to explore the question of whether said capacity can be translated and applied to refugee response.

This study joins a growing body of literature on the current Rohingya crisis and how it has unfolded. The value of this paper derives from applying the lens of capacity and complementarity to this active context. By interrogating how these concepts are interpreted in an ongoing humanitarian response, the opportunities and limitations of global-level reform processes can be explored. In addition, the research provides a broad perspective on how terms like ‘localisation’ and ‘capacity-building’ are understood, beyond the jargon used by the aid sector.

1.3 Data collection and limitations

This research was conducted in partnership with researchers from a small Bangladeshi NGO in Cox’s Bazar (Jago Nari Unnayan Sangsta) and a Bangladeshi research organisation based in Dhaka (Research Initiatives Bangladesh). Data collection took place between February and May 2018, a time when many issues around context, needs and operations were rapidly evolving in Bangladesh. We carried out 75 qualitative interviews with a range of stakeholders, including: local, national and international NGOs; UN agencies; journalists; experts on refugees and disasters; academics; and people in a variety of government roles. To protect participants, they are identified here according to their broad organisational affiliation (e.g. government official, international non-governmental organisation (INGO), UN agency) rather than by individual or organisation name. It should also be noted that the views and interpretations conveyed to us are those of individuals interviewed, rather than the formal positions held by the organisations they work for.

The authors recognise, without reservation, the importance of including the perspectives of refugees in research on refugees. However, following an assessment of ethical considerations (including how to ask for consent through an informed process and risks versus benefits of the research for refugees) pertaining to this research, we decided not to include refugee participants because we did not believe the conditions were in place to conduct this research in adherence with ethical standards in the camps in Bangladesh at the time of data collection. Where possible, refugee perspectives presented in other research have been cited.

Research was conducted prior to the rainy season in Cox’s Bazar, and thus reflects what was a dynamic and unfolding crisis at that point in time. It is pertinent to note that interviews were conducted with operational stakeholders during an active humanitarian response, and some respondents were constrained by time and operational circumstances, which may have affected their willingness to speak openly. While some respondents were well versed in issues surrounding localisation and capacity, many interviewees did not seem to have reflected on them. Lack of shared understanding in how people understand these topics – including, more specifically, differing interpretations of commitments made in the Grand Bargain and Charter for Change (Van Brabant and Patel, 2018a) – is itself a finding, one explored further in this paper.

1.4 The crisis context

Since the beginning of the crisis in August 2017, the characteristics of responders have evolved: from an initial response with heavy involvement from Bangladeshi individuals, communities, organisations and government departments who provided food, shelter and supplies to the Rohingya, to increased involvement and proliferation NGOs, including international actors, followed by a reduction in NGO presence, with those remaining starting to consolidate operations. The scope of the response itself has evolved from addressing the urgent needs of refugees, to considering the needs of host communities and the risks of a ‘crisis within a crisis’ posed to both groups during the monsoon season (ACAPS, 2018; Sullivan, 2018), as well as medium-term planning.

A consistent feature of the response is the extent to which it has been led by the Government of Bangladesh and supported by Bangladesh’s vibrant civil society and NGOs. Particularly in the

current global refugee climate – characterised by restrictive policies and closed borders (Hargrave et al., 2016) – Bangladesh should be recognised for keeping its border open to Rohingya refugees, and for the significant monetary and human resource contributions expended in responding to the crisis. Yet the policies of Bangladesh, which have been based on containment and curtailment of rights and freedoms (like many Western and other countries) (Hargrave et al., 2016) rather than refugee rights and protection (Sullivan, 2018), have shaped the nature of the response itself, arguably to the detriment of refugees. Over a year since the large-scale forced displacement took place, both the policies and broader response deserve critical assessment. This is particularly important as the constrained policy environment in Bangladesh, the absence of any realistic prospect of safe and voluntary return and the lack of political progress to resolve the crisis in Myanmar all suggest that displacement will be protracted. Experience shows that, once a refugee is displaced for over six months, they are highly likely to be in exile for years. There is no reason to believe that this refugee crisis will be any different (Wake and Yu, 2018).

While the large scale of the crisis has created enormous needs (the UN has appealed for \$950.8 million for the 2018 response), which are unlikely to diminish in the foreseeable future, opportunities for new partnerships, ways of working, and policy reform have been created; as a key informant we interviewed reflected, ‘crisis creates opportunity to work’. The refugee crisis in Bangladesh has attracted attention, resources and people from all over the world: this paper will explore how the opportunities related to capacity and complementarity have been perceived and utilised by the stakeholders involved.

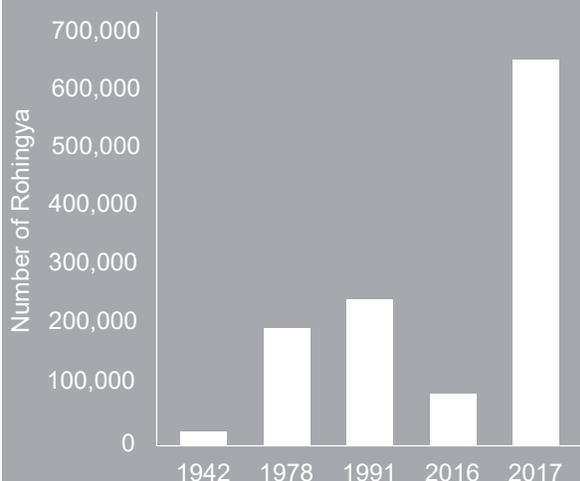
1.5 Structure of the paper

The paper is structured as follows: Chapter 2 describes the different stakeholders involved in the response to Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, Chapter 3 explores issues around capacity, including how it is perceived in the response, and Chapter 4 considers issues of complementarity, partnership, and coordination. Chapter 5 concludes the paper.

Box 1: Repeating history? The importance of understanding past experiences of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh

While the 2017 influx of Rohingya refugees to Bangladesh was by far the largest, Rohingya have long fled to what is now Bangladesh (HRW, 2000), with previous large-scale movements occurring in 1978 and 1991 (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Major influxes to Bangladesh of the Rohingya population, 1942–present



Source: ACAPS (2017: 2).

The Government of Bangladesh’s responses to Rohingya refugees in both 1978 and 1991 are characterised by the same policies that underpin their response to Rohingya refugees today, including containing refugees in a small geographic area with substandard living conditions, restricting the types and quantity of aid that can be provided to them, refusing to consider integration, and a persistent focus on repatriation, despite conditions not being in place (Human

Rights Watch (HRW), 1996, 2000; MSF, 2002). Following the 1978 influx, food rations were cut and conditions became increasingly difficult in the camps (some assert intentionally, to encourage return) (Lindquist, 1979), and ultimately Rohingya refugees from both the 1978 and 1991 influxes were repatriated to Myanmar under conditions that were less than voluntary at best, and coerced or forced at worst (ibid.).

It is an indictment of Myanmar, Bangladesh and geopolitics more broadly – and of the humanitarian system that has, on numerous occasions, facilitated Rohingya refugees’ return to Myanmar – that some Rohingya were forcibly displaced for the third time in 2017. The international community, and the UN in particular, has clear lessons to learn when it comes to their historical and present-day engagement with Myanmar (Mahoney, 2018). The cyclical nature of displacement of Rohingya refugees was clear 20 years ago, when Human Rights Watch (HRW) (1996: 1) asserted ‘the refugee problem will not be solved until and unless the Rohingyas are recognized as citizens by the Burmese Government and granted the rights they are currently denied. They will remain a vulnerable group, always ready to flee if the alternative is to suffer further abuse.’ Only two things can prevent the cycle of displacement and return from continuing: Myanmar must resolve the conditions that have caused the forced displacement of the Rohingya (beginning with citizenship, in addition to actions such as those set out by the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State (2017)); failing that, Bangladesh and the international community must provide the international assistance and protection to which the Rohingya are entitled.

2 Stakeholder mapping

Prior to 2017, a relatively small number of local and international NGOs worked with Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. The 2017 influx of refugees saw the introduction of thousands of civilian, humanitarian, and development responders and served as a catalyst for shifts in power between different stakeholders. The sheer scale of the crisis necessitated this large number of arrivals: no one stakeholder had sufficient capacity to meet the needs of refugees on their own. It is estimated, for example, that in 2018 refugees will need more than 16 million litres of water each day, 12,200 metric tonnes of food per month, and 50,000 latrines with more reliable substructures to be constructed and maintained (ISCG, 2018a: 10). As of February 2018, 130 NGOs were responding to the crisis alongside the Government of Bangladesh, including at least 13 local, 45 national and 69 international NGOs, the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, and 12 UN agencies (ISCG, 2018b: 19).

In any humanitarian response, the configuration of stakeholders and responders differs: the following chapter provides a brief descriptive ‘mapping’ of the different stakeholders in Cox’s Bazar, introducing the key players around which subsequent discussion on capacity and complementarity is based. The authors recognise the challenges inherent in assigning labels to diverse individuals and groups, and the arbitrary nature of the ‘local’ label in particular (Jayawickrama and Rehman, 2018). First, a ‘local’ response for the Rohingya would comprise Rohingya individuals and groups.³ Second, in most humanitarian organisations the majority of staff are nationally recruited (Christoplos, 2005: 33; see Barbelet, 2018 for further discussion); as one UN staff respondent in Bangladesh told us, ‘I don’t think of this agency as strictly international – it’s 60–70% local [Bangladeshi] staff’. Indeed, many of the respondents

we interviewed working for international organisations were Bangladeshi. Recognising the challenges inherent in polarising local/international labels, the following section discusses categories of stakeholders, acknowledging they comprise diverse individuals and organisations.

2.1 Mapping different stakeholders and their roles

2.1.1 Refugees

As of August 2018, there were over 900,000 Rohingya estimated to be living in Cox’s Bazar (ISCG, 2018c: 14). The capacity of refugees in camps in Cox’s Bazar – to meet their own immediate needs, establish livelihoods or pursue a durable solution⁴ – is highly constrained by government policies that limit their movement and rights (Sullivan, 2018). For example, while many Rohingya have the ability and desire to work (Xchange, 2018a), they are not legally allowed to. Similarly, as persons affected by crisis they stand to play a key leadership role in the camps, though challenges associated with the current *Majhi*⁵ system (notably, limited female representation) are well recognised and efforts to support more representative and democratic community representation are underway. At present, as one local NGO respondent in Cox’s Bazar asserted, ‘refugees are being asked for their opinions in every assessment that takes place in the camps, but they are not yet in any decision-making roles’ (local non-governmental organisation (LNGO) interview). Research indicates refugees themselves concur: a survey of refugees in the camps (Christian Aid and Gana Unnayan Kendra, 2018: 5) found that, while refugees generally felt the assistance they received was appropriate, ‘people largely felt it

3 Though far from the case in Bangladesh, it is worth juxtaposing the current response with examples of ‘localised’ refugee response, such as that of community-based camp management in camps of Myanmar refugees on the Thai border (Thompson, 2008).

4 Durable solutions, considered a cornerstone of refugee protection, refer primarily to one of three long-term solutions to displacement: voluntary repatriation, integration in the county of asylum, or resettlement to a third country.

5 *Majhis*, or community leaders, are typically Rohingya men who are responsible for managing issues (such as disputes, aid and service distribution, bringing the voices of the Rohingya to respective authorities), for up to 100 refugee households in the camps. A UNDP/ UN Women Social Impact assessment (2017) recognised the need for ‘regularizing the process and parameters of Majhi selection, including the selection of women Majhis... Offer support for Majhi mapping, expanded to include capacity gaps... Offer Majhi capacity building support based on assessed gaps.’

was not timely and they lacked influence in decision-making: 39% of women and 54% of men felt they had no influence at all in decision-making’.

Some respondents interviewed for this study conveyed stereotypical and fear-based narratives pertaining to the Rohingya (such as that they are ‘criminals’, uneducated, and at risk of radicalisation), views that in isolation frame refugees as a burden and a risk, rather than people with capacity to contribute. Yet respondents also felt part of the solution would be to recognise the potential human resources of refugees; as one said:

I think we should use them as human resource. Otherwise, they will be dependent forever on relief ... It cannot be denied that we do not have full capacity to maintain and regulate such huge number of uneducated people. They must be engaged in work and earning activities which will contribute to the reduction of crime among the Rohingya community (Government interview).

While refugees in Bangladesh are not legally allowed to work, many would like to and some do so informally: of participants in a 2018 ‘snapshot survey’ in Unchiprang and Shamlapur camps (comprised mostly of Rohingya who arrived in 2017), 54% were looking for employment (60% of men and 51% of women) (Xchange, 2018a: 14). While 10.5% of the refugee participants in this survey reported being engaged in daily labour, 2.8% in informal employment and 1.1% in formal employment, the majority paid for their household needs through assistance from a family member (33.5%), sale of non-food aid (27.5%) and sale of food aid (27.1%) (Xchange, 2018a: 15). A later study by Ground Truth Solutions (2018: 1) found a slightly higher number (43%) of refugees surveyed

had been selling aid items for cash to meet their needs, suggesting in-kind aid is not fully fit for purpose.

The Rohingya in Bangladesh are not one homogenous community; individuals and sub-groups have different capacities, largely linked to their experiences in Myanmar and resultant capital (linguistic, educational, social, etc.). Some refugees have acted as ‘volunteers’ in the camps, receiving and unloading relief items; being involved in small-scale cash for work projects; and training in search and rescue to support future disaster response efforts (IFRC, 2018a; 2018b). While it is positive that refugees can contribute their capacity to the response – many working alongside Bangladeshi colleagues and contributing equally – the title of volunteer (rather than staff) and low stipend fails to adequately reflect their contributions. More broadly, many refugees worked for UN agencies and INGOs in Myanmar, and have other valuable skills, experience and capacity that are currently not being utilised in the response (key informant interview). There is a pressing need to expand discussions around capacity to better recognise and include the capacity of refugees themselves in the humanitarian response.

2.1.2 Host populations

The host populations in Cox’s Bazar district – and specifically those in the two sub-districts (Ukhia and Teknaf) that host the largest number of Rohingya refugees – are important responders and stakeholders in Rohingya refugee response over past decades. The Government of Bangladesh estimates there to have been 303,070 Rohingya in Bangladesh prior to 25 August 2017 (ISCG, 2018b: 7). The dynamics changed significantly following the 2017 influx, which brought the proportion of Rohingya in the total population to between one-third (in Teknaf) and three-quarters (in Ukhia) in some upazilas (administrative units in Bangladesh) (see Table 1).

Table 1: Population breakdown by Upazila

Upazila	Population (2011 census)	Estimated population (excluding Rohingya) (2017)	Rohingya population in host community (Jan 2018)	Rohingya population in camps (Jan 2018)	Total Rohingya population in both camps and host community (Jan 2018)	% Rohingya in total population (Rohingya and host community)
Cox’s Bazar Sadar	459,000	517,150	7,941	-	7,941	1.5%
Ramu	266,600	310,100	1,640	-	1,640	>1%
Teknaf	264,400	307,300	64,571	64,986	129,737	29%
Ukhia	207,400	241,100	4,609	756,450	761,059	76%
Total	1,197,400	1,375,700	78,941	821,436	900,377	39%

Note: Population figures are rounded off.

Source: Government Census 2011, IOM NPM Round 8; ISCG 07/01/2017, ACAPS, 2017: 3

A recent XChange study (2018b) (comprising interviews and a survey of 1,697 adults conducted in June–July 2018, generalisable to whole of the Ukhia and Teknaf upazilas) provides insight into the demographic profile of the Bangladeshis living there and their views on the Rohingya. The research found ‘Interaction with the Rohingya was frequent for the locals in both Teknaf and Ukhia: three in four respondents (75%) interacted with the Rohingya at least once a week’, and 70% reported having ever helped a Rohingya.

Individuals and institutions in the host population were among the first responders when Rohingya refugees arrived in 2017, offering them food, shelter, clothing, and other support to meet their immediate needs. Yet the narrative of a welcoming host community has waned in recent months – while those in host communities empathise with the Rohingya and feel they integrate well in the local community, some are concerned about specific issues (such as perceived safety risks, refugees attending local schools or intermarriage) (Xchange, 2018). Humanitarian actors have been slow to engage host communities as key stakeholders or beneficiaries – though some respondents noted they are now devoting 30% of resources to them. Potential issues between refugees and the host population have become a great concern for government and NGO stakeholders, and there is a need to address the issue of social coexistence, whether through targeted activities or mainstreaming this component across various sectors. As one local NGO staff respondent said, ‘Apart from monsoons, the biggest risk is co-existence between the host communities and Rohingya refugees’. One respondent further explained:

When there were a limited number of Rohingya people living in our area, our local people helped them a lot ... The recent influx that took place in August 2017 has changed the entire scenario and also altered the attitudes of the host community to the refugees ... I believe we have a very impressive capacity right now to look after these Rohingya people until they get repatriated. However, I am afraid of this that they will not get repatriated and eventually the greatest sorrow will come on the shoulders of the local people living in Ukhia and Teknaf (Interview, government officer).

Cox’s Bazar has experienced many decades of relatively high poverty,⁶ vulnerability to cyclones, flooding and landslides, and previous instances of forced displacement of the Rohingya. Whilst both international and local respondents stress the high resilience of the residents of the area to these sudden-onset events, they viewed the influx of refugees as a burden on them (interviews). Interview respondents cited key challenges for the host population regarding refugees as: resource scarcity, security concerns, environmental degradation, increased prices of some goods and accommodation, labour market displacement, and disruption of services (such as transportation and education). These challenges are both legitimate and significant. Yet respondents raised concerns that the Rohingya have also been scapegoated; as one journalist asserted, some in the local host community ‘are looking at Rohingyas as the source of their all problems’ (journalist interview). Some in the host population have in fact benefited from the influx of refugees (through, for example, humanitarian assistance, employment at NGOs and other businesses, increased business in the hospitality industries, engagement of the local private sector through large-scale contracts for goods or services, market transactions on small and large scales), while others (human traffickers, criminals) have benefited from exploiting the refugees’ presence. Categorical, one-dimensional references to host communities are therefore unhelpful in understanding the nuanced ‘wins’ and ‘losses’ various members of the host community are experiencing in relation to the presence of (and response to) Rohingya refugees.

The situation of host communities was discussed vis-à-vis refugees in many of the interviews conducted for this study. Yet while the material circumstances of the poorest in the host community may indeed share similarities with refugees, they cannot be held in direct comparison because Bangladeshi citizens have rights and freedoms that, while they may struggle to actualise, refugees do not have. Discussion of host communities has occurred less on a premise of responding impartially to needs than amidst tacit understanding that, if the needs of host communities are not met, it could lead to unrest (interviews). Ultimately, Bangladesh has managed to receive over 900,000 refugees and still maintain an open border to those fleeing, but it remains to be seen how events

6 Though the district, or zila, of Cox’s Bazar displays fairly typical levels of poverty, with 32% of the population earning less than \$1.90 per person per day (the 35th highest of Bangladesh’s 64 districts), and several of its sub-districts lying along the Myanmar border, into which many of the refugees have settled, are some of the most deprived in Bangladesh. Thanchi and Naikhongchhari upazilas have a poverty rate of 53% and 46% respectively and the rest of the border sub-districts suffer from rates higher than the national average (World Bank, 2016).

(such as severe weather or climate-related disasters) and aid interventions (meeting urgent humanitarian needs or longer-term, large-scale interventions such as a refugee compact) will affect the social contract between politicians and constituent host communities – and concomitantly – in the long term.

2.1.3 State actors

Various parts of the government, the army, and border guards are powerful stakeholders and contribute significant capacity to the current refugee response. They have had to make urgent, difficult decisions about issues pertaining to the border, land demarcation, resources, access, and roles for international and national responders. In doing so, ‘the entire state machinery has been mobilized’ (expert interview). This includes representatives of the central government (local administration and the District Coordinator’s (DC) office, which leads in organising the response on a local level); local elected councils; local ministries (for example the Ministry of Health, and the Rohingya Relief and Repatriation Commission (RRRC) under the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief); the NGO affairs bureau (which manages permission for NGOs to operate, amongst other things); various appointed and elected individuals; and the armed forces division and Bangladesh border guard. The army and border guards have been involved from the beginning: as one border guard said, ‘We saw the burning houses of Rohingya people, the forests in the Myanmar side from our border line’ (interview). They have been entrusted with critical responsibilities in the camps related to camp management, data collection, and control of all relief distribution, and were seen by numerous respondents as a stabilising force in what was initially a chaotic situation. This array of state actors has adopted a strong leadership role over the response in Cox’s Bazar. Such control is evident in the close oversight government maintains over aspects of the response, including which NGOs have access and the type of work they do (interviews). However, they have struggled to manifest this control effectively because structures were not in place to respond to a crisis of this magnitude (for example, in the early months there was no mechanism to get approval for a humanitarian assistance project that lasted more than three months).

Reflecting on their work in Cox’s Bazar, one INGO respondent noted that ‘We have a facilitating role and don’t lead it, even if we wanted to, any work involving the Rohingyas is now minutely scrutinised by the government’ (interview). A range of stakeholders noted challenges linked to the actions of governing

actors in Cox’s Bazar including one national NGO, who felt it was ‘more difficult to work in Cox’s Bazar area than any other places in Bangladesh. Political polarisation, pressure from the host community, bureaucratic bottlenecks, multi-layered approval authority and dispersion of power between civil and military are responsible for this’ (national non-governmental organisation (NNGO) interview).

The dynamics in Cox’s Bazar are, of course, intrinsically linked with and affected by national governance and the centralisation of power in the capital, with strategic decisions regarding the refugee response being made by national government (including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Prime Minister’s Office). Prior to the Rohingya crisis, critical assessments have been made regarding state capacity. Zafarullah and Rahman (2008: 749) conclude their assessment of state governance and capacity by asserting:

Mechanisms for enhancing accountability, transparency and predictability in governance are inadequate. The failure of state institutions and [sic] has eroded the capabilities of government in achieving the goals of development and sustainability. Notwithstanding some sporadic successes in quasi-state organizations, in general, Bangladesh has succumbed to political indiscretion and bureaucratic intemperance which have severely diminished the capacity of the state to perform at a preferred level.

A more recent assessment of capacity, focused on state capacity in humanitarian response in Bangladesh was similarly critical. A locally-led, comprehensive humanitarian learning capacity and market assessment by the Humanitarian Leadership Academy (HLA) and Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC) (2017: iv) in Bangladesh identified ‘major gaps/challenges in current humanitarian response performance’. Key challenges identified include (but are not limited to):

humanitarian principles and standards are not in practice as the concept of humanitarian issues are not directly included in the current disaster management policy framework; the package of humanitarian assistance is often not embedded with international humanitarian principles and standards; lack of proper mechanism to select the right beneficiaries for humanitarian assistance; inadequate practice and implementation of Standing Order on Disaster (SOD); complex coordination and

lack of information sharing among responsible ministries and line departments; duplication or overflow of humanitarian assistance only in accessible areas leaving a large portion of affected communities un-served due to poor communication network; government control on humanitarian assistance to refugees and undocumented migrants by NGO and donor agencies (HLA and ADPC, 2017: iv–v).

It is against this backdrop that the government has been confronted with tensions inherent to any country providing space to nearly one million refugees while managing political pressures in an election year⁷ and geopolitical issues surrounding a durable solution. The role and capacity of state actors in responding to Rohingya refugees are further explored throughout this report.

2.1.4 Local and national humanitarian actors (LNHA)

Bangladeshi NGOs⁸ have played a prominent role in the response. Their existence, along with religious institutions also engaging in relief work, has become entwined with the political landscape of the region, with some local NGOs prominent in providing basic services and correspondingly wielding a high degree of political power. One respondent went so far as to describe Bangladesh as a ‘country of NGOs’, such is their number and visibility. While many of them lacked experience in refugee response, they brought relevant experience working with local communities on social and economic issues and disasters and were among the first to help meet the immediate needs of refugees. Since the onset of the crisis, many local organisations have grown significantly in size, capacity, and remit (interviews). Respondents noted the range of contributions LNGOs have made to the response, including local expertise and experiences (strong understanding of local culture, communities, leadership structures, and governance), social capital, and an ability to communicate with refugees.

Local organisations have established networks and coalitions (including the NGO Coordination and Support Cell and the Cox’s Bazar Civil Society Forum (CCNF)), which have helped establish common positions and increased their visibility. The CCNF has been particularly vocal, advocating on

issues such as greater localisation of the response (CCNF, 2017). Respondents noted that local organisations had strong awareness of political dynamics and were particularly influential with local government. Local organisations themselves framed their work as supporting the government, as one asserted, the government was the ‘key boss’ and ‘we are just a helping hand’ (LNGO interview).

Some organisations grew quickly (e.g. one hired 700 people, mostly volunteers, to support their response to the Rohingya crisis) (LNGO interview): while this was important in order to respond to the scale of need, and in principle counters questions of whether LNGOs can respond at scale, respondents did raise questions around quality, sustainability and whether some organisations are operating at or over capacity (interviews). As an early assessment on local leadership in the first three months of the response notes ‘local and national organisations are being stretched to capacity without partnership approaches and capacity support in place to manage the rapid scale-up’ (HAG and NIRAPAD, 2017). Respondents (including local NGOs themselves) reflected on other constraints or challenges pertaining to their capacity in the response, including a shortage of skilled staff and the need for financial and technical support. While some respondents noted that local NGOs made substantial contributions to the response, others were more critical; this is explored further in Chapter 3.

More broadly, some described tensions stemming from their dual role as embedded in and serving the host community while expanding their focus to refugees; as one LNGO noted, they were worried about being branded ‘Rohingya friendly’ (LNGO interview). Some international actors took a stronger view, asserting that ‘a lot of local NGOs also have grievances and biases against the Rohingya that are definitely impacting the way they implement projects’ (key informant interview). A similar sentiment exists among some LNHAAs that INGOs are biased toward the Rohingya. The dynamics between national and international actors are explored in further detail later in the report.

2.1.5 International humanitarian actors

INGOs occupy an important yet constrained place in the response. Many have substantial experiential,

7 According to the constitution of Bangladesh, the 2018 general election is required to be held by 31 December. National politics is highly polarised between the ruling Awami League led by Sheikh Hasina and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) led by Khaleda Zia. The previous general election in 2014 was boycotted by the BNP and many other parties and marred by major civil unrest, the detention of opposition leaders and violence that killed 21 people (Al Jazeera, 2014).

8 In addition to NGOs based in and around Cox’s Bazar, respondents noted that some NGOs from other parts of Bangladesh had become active in Cox’s Bazar for the first time following the influx of refugees and resources.

technical, and resource capacity, and have played active roles as funders and partners (of LNHA), direct responders, implementing partners (for donors, the UN and other INGOs) and technical advisors. While many of the INGOs now operating in the refugee response had development programmes in other parts of Bangladesh prior to the 2017 influx, few had been working with refugees in Cox's Bazar prior to August 2017. After the influx, some opened field offices in Cox's Bazar in direct response to humanitarian needs, or flew in experts to strengthen the capacity of their Bangladesh office.

Numerous INGOs described undertaking a broad range of programmes – including relief, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), training, protection and shelter – and adapting their activities based on direction from the government. Respondents highlighted positive aspects of their contribution, including the value of their global experience, financial and technical capacity (interviews). One donor respondent noted that 'INGOs are essential and need to be valued – the UN doesn't have capacity to do the front-line work, they are subcontracting and relying on INGOs' (donor interview). Some INGOs were particularly well placed to respond to the crisis, having decades of experience in Bangladesh and the region, experience in refugee response, and financial and human resources; as one INGO said, 'While nobody would have been prepared for 700,000 people, we had 150 team members, and a very localised team, in place before the influx and so we were better prepared than most' (INGO interview). Others were less so, and a high turnover of international staff, some of whom lacked experience, was cited as a challenge.

Despite their potential capacity, INGOs interviewed for this study listed a range of challenges in actualising it in the response. Some were internal, such as dissatisfaction with their regional office overseeing the response, the belief that people in senior positions (or the organisation as a whole) did not have the experience to fulfil the role they were adopting, and that they were at times limited by funding constraints. Most challenges, however, related to constraints imposed by the government, in particular access and 'bureaucratic complexities' related to visas and the type of programmes that could be conducted. Some INGOs with significant in-country and refugee response experience were restricted from operating in the camps. One of these INGOs linked this to its work with Rohingya refugees and interactions with the government prior to the 2017 influx, which they believed motivated the government to restrain and limit their reach (INGO interview). Numerous INGOs

emphasised the importance of positive pre-existing relationships with the government, specifically noting that conducting work in other parts of Bangladesh, and undertaking work related to host communities and disaster response as creating 'political capital' (interviews); as one INGO said, 'Our previous presence there is a big positive with the government – there's a sense of trust I think. They also recognise we are working with the host community.'

In addition to INGOs, an array of UN agencies is involved in the response, including the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Food Programme (WFP), UNICEF, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UN Women, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Amongst respondents in the study, UN agencies were consistently perceived as having significant resources and technical capacity in the response, while they subcontracted and relied on international and Bangladeshi NGOs to carry out frontline work. Respondents also noted, however, that the unusual configuration of UN agencies (while UNHCR is typically the lead agency in refugee responses, the Government of Bangladesh appointed IOM in a leadership role in the response with the government) has disrupted typical roles and responsibilities, contributing to a scenario where UN agencies are vying for space, resources and recognition. The effect this has had on the nature of the response, partnerships, and accountability, as well as the role of the Inter-Sector Coordination Group (ISCG led by IOM/Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)) are discussed in Chapter 4 on coordination.

2.1.6 Donors and philanthropic organisations

Bilateral donor governments from the OECD-DAC play a critical role in supporting the Government of Bangladesh and providing funding for the humanitarian response. The top five sources of donor funding for the 2017 UN appeal were, in descending order, the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, the European Union (EU) and the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF). Non-DAC bilateral donors, of which the most prominent is the Government of Turkey, also work in the camps with the consent of the host government. Turkey has donated significant amounts of money and in-kind aid (Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency, 2017: 47), but because much of it does not pass through UN funding mechanisms it is difficult to quantify. In mid-2018,

the World Bank approved International Development Association (IDA) funding to help Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, initially through a \$50 million grant for the health sector (World Bank, 2018). It is the first in a series of grants that could reach \$480 million in a range of sectors, including education, WASH, disaster risk management, and social protection.

Given the scale of funding and in-kind aid donors provide, they are uniquely situated to advocate, alongside other stakeholders, for the Government of Bangladesh to improve their refugee policies and response strategy. While there are very early indications of potential headway around issues such as education, the extent to which donors and others can influence the government to, for example, allow unrestricted cash programming, grant official refugee status, allow refugees to move freely or pursue employment legally remains to be seen. Regarding capacity to respond to refugees in Bangladesh, one INGO respondent highlighted discordance between donor and INGO perspectives, saying ‘there are differences between the needs and aspirations of donors and I think the perceptions of many INGOs – the former want greater localisation and many in the

latter have doubts over capacity’ (INGO interview). Another respondent working for the UN in Cox’s Bazar noted that, as a distributor of donor funds, their agency absorbed a lot of risk (for example, if a local NGO recipient does not spend it as per the agreement, the UN agency would be liable).

2.2 Conclusion

It is clear from this initial introduction to the different stakeholders involved in responding to the needs of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh that they have different incentives and roles. While stakeholders are discussing and in some cases supporting a recalibration of roles and resources as part of the localisation agenda, the situation in Bangladesh suggests it will be a frustrating process so long as they try to implement it without understanding what unique capacity exists among different stakeholders. The following chapter considers how local stakeholders understand capacity, the challenges with the discourse around capacity strengthening, and factors that enable and inhibit capacity from being actualised.

3 Capacity in the response to Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh

The stakeholders outlined in the previous chapter have tried, with varying success, to respond to the enormous needs generated by the refugee crisis in Bangladesh, including those related to refugees themselves (such as food, shelter, and psychosocial needs, and protection), as well as concomitant needs associated with disaster response, host communities, and the environment. This chapter examines issues of capacity in their response. This study derives understanding of capacity by grounding it in the specific temporal, geographical and humanitarian response context in which the research was conducted.

3.1 Capacity before and after the 2017 refugee influx

Bangladesh in general, and Cox's Bazar in particular, is prone to severe weather and disasters (ACAPS, 2018). Recognising the dynamic nature of capacity, this research considered if and how capacity to mitigate the effects of disasters could be applied in responding to the 2017 refugee influx. While influxes of Rohingya refugees to Bangladesh have occurred since the late 1970s, none have been as large as 2017, and the Government of Bangladesh's restrictive policies towards registration, freedom of movement, and access to work with or assist refugees meant national and local NGOs had limited exposure and experience of formal humanitarian response to refugees, while INGOs had limited experience of refugee response in the Bangladesh context.

Bangladesh has developed capacity to manage disaster risk, as exemplified by a dramatic reduction in the number of deaths and injuries caused by cyclones. For example, between 1970–2007 the death toll from three cyclones – all severity level

6 – decreased dramatically from 500,300 deaths in 1970, to 138,958 deaths in 1991 to 4,234 deaths in 2007 (Haque et al., 2012; see Table 1 'Cyclone severity and deaths in Bangladesh 1960–2010').

Our interview respondents, many of whom recognised that, while there was still room for improvement, saw that action at the community level meant that capacity to respond to severe weather and disasters had evolved and improved over time. Many respondents recognised the role of national and local government and NGOs in these efforts, with a few national NGOs ultimately singling out local communities as critical first responders who have developed capacity over time. As one respondent noted:

over the years [Bangladesh] has become resilient after coping so much with the various types of disaster, now we are not fully dependent on foreign donations to respond because when a crisis hits the immediate/ emergency responders are the community people (NNGO interview).

Core competencies required for disaster risk reduction (DRR) and response (such as logistics, shelter, communicating with affected communities, and in-kind distribution) are also necessary in humanitarian response in refugee camps, and a few interviewees were optimistic that Bangladesh's positive response to disasters signalled potential for effective humanitarian response more broadly. Other Bangladeshi stakeholders (including a respondent from government, a legal expert and an LNGO) recognised that, while Bangladesh has significant capacity to respond to disasters, it needed more and different types of capacity to respond to the refugee crisis. Such views are aligned with analysis contained in the ADPC (2017: 14) capacity assessment in Bangladesh, which states:

Box 2: How capacity is understood in Bangladesh

A perception survey conducted as part of the broader programme of work by HPG on capacity and complementarity provides a more grounded sense of how stakeholders from around the world define and understand capacity in the humanitarian sector. As described in Barbelet (2018), their understanding and definitions of capacity included:

- Capacity as human resources and expertise.
- Capacity as financial resources or the ability to access funding.
- Capacity as individual, organisational, community and affected people's capacity.
- Capacity as the ability to adhere to certain values (independence, empowerment), principles/standards (Core Humanitarian Standard, humanitarian principles), and approaches (coordinated response, preparedness, people-centred).
- Capacity as something to be strengthened and

built through training, mentorship, advice.

- Capacity as the ability to respond in a certain manner: timely, appropriate, effective, quality, at scale, efficient, equitable, professional.
- Capacity as the ability to reach the objective of humanitarian action: to respond to needs of affected populations.

These conceptualisations of what comprises capacity in humanitarian response are well aligned with our findings from Bangladesh. All of the above points were mentioned by those we interviewed, though the last point – capacity to respond to needs of affected populations, in this case Rohingya refugees – was largely tangential rather than at the heart of discussion surrounding capacity. A further aspect of capacity that emerged from our research in Bangladesh is the distinction between potential and actualised capacity, an issue explored later in the chapter.

The current disaster management policy framework does not directly include the concept of humanitarian issues. The disaster management programs are also mostly associated with disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation and resilient [sic] building which are directly linked with the dominant objective of socio-economic development and poverty reduction. Therefore, core humanitarian principles and standards are not in practice. This makes [sic] difficult to articulate a humanitarian system centered in the protection of human dignity.⁹

Indeed, restrictive government policies toward refugees (such as confinement to camps and resistance to the construction of more stable 'permanent' shelters) have undermined both their dignity and efforts to forge a humanitarian response that capitalises on available resources and capacity, including that of refugees themselves. For example, NGOs were unable to apply some of the DRR strategies they use with host communities (such as large-scale evacuation plans, constructing robust shelters, etc.) because of the density of the camps and restricted movement of

refugees. As one respondent said, 'There's mock drills and other infrastructure things for local people¹⁰ to do with floods and landslides, but those things don't exist for the Rohingya' (INGO interview).

Labbé (2018), writing about the ICRC and localisation, argues that while localisation 'makes full sense' in responses to disasters and development contexts, it may not necessarily be adequate in other humanitarian response (such as conflict). In such situations, capacity may be weakened or destroyed, or 'it may be strong enough but too politically biased, corrupt, restricted or intimidated to respond impartially in all areas affected by an armed conflict' (ibid.). While Bangladesh is not a conflict situation, localisation can also prove complex in displacement situations, due to the politically sensitive nature of accepting and hosting refugees. During disasters, LNHA support the government disaster response, while, in a displacement context, responders often have to advocate against government policies to align with humanitarian principles and support refugee rights. This case study provides some insight into how considerations around capacity, complementarity and localisation arise in a displacement response.

9 For an exploration of the concept of dignity among Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, see Holloway and Fan (2018).

10 The discrepancy in DRR and response for host communities versus refugees exemplifies the need to recognise both groups as affected, while also acknowledging the differential nature of their needs, vulnerabilities, and opportunities, as discussed elsewhere in the report.

Ultimately, responding to the influx of Rohingya refugees requires capacities beyond those required to mitigate and respond to disasters affecting citizens in Bangladesh. Capacities needed – among local and international actors – to effectively respond include those related to principled humanitarian response, refugee rights and protection, ability to respond at scale, technical capacities (related to protection, gender, refugee livelihoods, etc.), accountability to affected populations, and critical engagement and advocacy with the government to improve access, rights and protection space for the Rohingya in Bangladesh. The rest of the chapter explores perceptions of capacity among stakeholders involved in the response, including how they align (or not) with those needed.

3.2 Perceptions of capacity in the response

It is challenging to objectively ‘assess’ capacity in a context given the lack of shared understanding of what the term means; the multifaceted nature of capacity and differing values attributed to certain types of capacities (such as strong emphasis by international stakeholders on minimising fiduciary risk and strengthening technical, measurable capacities); lack of adequate measurement mechanisms (what makes capacity sufficient or insufficient?); and limited recognition of the fluidity of capacity and how it evolves over time (as a crisis/response shifts from emergency to protracted). As discussions around localisation and capacity continue in the wake of the World Humanitarian Summit, Grand Bargain, and Charter for Change, it is nevertheless important to critically consider how stakeholders perceive issues around capacity in one of the largest humanitarian responses in recent years. Is the current discourse extolling the benefits and possibilities of localisation reflected in the individual perspectives of those in the field regarding capacity and complementarity in Cox’s Bazar?

3.2.1 International NGOs and the UN

In exploring capacity of international NGOs and UN agencies involved in the response, both international and Bangladeshi respondents identified them as having financial resources, technical capacities, and the capacity to scale up. A few national and local respondents noted that the capacity of local NGOs had increased due to collaboration and partnership with INGOs, reflecting the ability of INGOs to contribute to local capacity during emergencies.

A UN respondent described a key aspect of the agency’s capacity as being able to adhere to the values and norms of the formal humanitarian system, noting ‘a large part of our own capacity is to fulfil donor requests to abide by rules over procurement by vetting all of our partners’ (interview). In that sense, the capacity of international NGOs and UN agencies can be summed up as contributing financial resources, the ability to operate and support interventions at scale, contributing sector-wide standards and technical expertise, and the capacity to adhere to donor standards including assessing the ability of others to do so. In many ways these elements of capacity are standardised rather than specific to a particular crisis or context.

While some INGOs discussed the need to build their own capacity through their work in Cox’s Bazar (for example, in order to meet the scale of need, or build experience in refugee response), and acknowledged funding constraints, there was little reflection among INGOs and UN agencies on limitations in their own capacity, or how their presence in Cox’s Bazar affected LNHA. One donor identified some drawbacks, noting that, while the entry of international agencies and surge response in Cox’s Bazar had brought capacity, it has also been difficult and demotivating for those providing local capacity (not only local NGOs, but local staff in the UN), who had felt side-lined. This is aligned with the analysis of Van Brabant and Patel (2018a: 63; 2018b), who note that, while Bangladesh national and local actors (alone or in partnership with international actors) would usually take the responsibility for disaster preparation and response, this refugee response entailed the ‘tremendous assertion by international agencies of their presence and leading influence’, with little understanding of what local capacity already existed in Cox’s Bazar.

Unsurprisingly, national respondents identified a broader variety of ways in which international NGOs were limited in capacity, or where they felt the actions of international stakeholders may have compromised the capacity of local actors. On a practical level, LNHA noted challenges to building entry points for international responders because they did not speak the local language, had limited sense of the evolving needs and challenges of the local community, and some in the host community harboured suspicion against them. Linked to this, an LNHA noted how UN agencies and affiliated institutions failed to adapt to the realities in Cox’s Bazar, instead pursuing strict operational policies and guidelines. While, as mentioned above, this was held up as a form of capacity by one UN

respondent, it was perceived as creating difficulties for their partnership by an NNGO. LNHA noted that INGOs ‘poached’ their staff and paid higher salaries (an issue discussed in Chapter 4), and that short-term funding undermined their capacity by preventing them from building on past project outcomes or maintaining trained staff. Given the likely long-term nature of the response, they felt long-term engagement was needed, but were not confident INGOs were best placed to maintain such engagement.

In considering respondents’ views on the capacity of international actors in Cox’s Bazar, it is pertinent to note how different standards are applied to INGOs and LNGOs/NNGOs. For example, one interview respondent from a government department in Cox’s Bazar said they had heard that a well-known INGO working in the camps was not providing salaries to its employees on time, and was forcing its employees to work overtime regularly, which they described as ‘bad practice’. This example – in which actions that would likely be characterised as a lack of organisational capacity for LNHA are considered bad practice for an INGO – highlights the need to critically consider how language and standards are applied in discussing capacity among different types of stakeholders. Our findings suggest that aspects of capacity perceived to be held and prioritised by international actors are often linked to technical capacities and global standards, whereas criticism of international actors is based on contextual knowledge and the ability to forge collaborative relationships.

3.2.2 Capacity of LNHA

When discussing capacity in the Rohingya response in Cox’s Bazar, international and national respondents consistently identified local knowledge as an important form of capacity held by LNHA. They phrased this as: ‘capacity in terms of indigenous knowledge and culture’ (INGO interview); local experiences and expertise (LNGO and INGO); better understanding of culture, community, leadership structure and political dynamics in the camps (expert interview); and awareness of ‘the local language, beliefs and psychology’ (expert interview), which enabled them to respond efficiently and effectively.

In Cox’s Bazar, local and national NGOs and community members also have technical and localised

knowledge, and offer better value for money than many international organisations. For example, some have significant experience responding to disasters and implementing WASH projects, including technical aspects pertaining to topography, flooding, and the effects of deforestation (expert interview). Respondents from some international organisations recognised the capacity of local and national NGOs to engage with the government, because ‘they share a common lingua franca with local authority’ (INGO interview). Numerous LNGOs reflected that they saw their role as following and supporting, rather than questioning or challenging, the government regarding the Rohingya response, which has likely generated trust and engagement between them that facilitates LNGOs’ access to the camps and negotiating ability (for example, regarding policies to facilitate greater localisation of the response).

While local actors are perhaps best placed to act as a bridge between host communities and refugees, such local dynamics are not without difficulty. LNGOs are currently presented with difficult decisions regarding allocation of resources, understanding and assessment of need, and international rights and principles, which are at times incongruent with the desires of the host community. For example, one LNGO noted the internal tensions within their organisation regarding how to balance their programmes to support both local communities (previously their sole beneficiaries) and refugees. An international expert raised concerns that some LNHA have grievances and biases against the Rohingya that impact the implementation of projects, for example reluctance to undertake long-term programmes in parallel with pushing for expedient repatriation and resisting integration – a stance similar to that of the government, therefore raising questions about whether LNHA are ultimately working towards what the Rohingya themselves want and in line with international standards (for example, around voluntary repatriation).¹¹

Capacity in the form of experience in principled humanitarian response and familiarity with international norms, laws and standards, and specific vulnerabilities related to displacement could help mitigate the issues above, but was deemed lacking among LNHA by some respondents.¹² LNHA themselves noted the challenge of being part of such

11 It is important to caveat this with the recognition that these such views may be held on an individual as well as organisational level, and that individuals may work for local, national, or international organisations.

12 As historical responses to refugees in Bangladesh illustrate (see Box.1 ‘Repeating history? The importance of understanding past experiences of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh’), this is not to imply that international actors always have or demonstrate these capacities.

a large-scale response with limited humanitarian and refugee experience; a few identified lack of skilled local staff as a key shortcoming in capacity, while others noted a lack of technical capacity, specifically pertaining to gender and protection in the response. These areas – principled humanitarian response, gender and protection – were mentioned as areas in which efforts were being made to strengthen local capacity, suggesting some congruence between capacity needs and capacity strengthening activities.

Some respondents also conveyed uncertainty regarding the ability of LNGOs to scale up, and the capacities of local organisations reaching their limits. One LNHA noted that local or national actors could have run the emergency response, but not sustainably, as they needed support in terms of finances, technical expertise and coordination (specifically, prioritising needs by sector). It is also likely that emergency response funding mechanisms (which tend to be short-term and earmarked for specific activities) limit the ability of LNHAs to strengthen their organisational capacity to run programmes sustainably. Yet it would be unfair to say that local actors alone were overwhelmed. Difficulties responding at scale were not and are not unique to local actors, with respondents from INGOs and the UN also seeing this as a challenge. Indeed, both international and local actors proved able to mobilise large numbers of staff and volunteers.

A few respondents from INGOs and UN agencies expressed criticism of LNHAs that on the surface related to lack of capacity, but could also reflect the respondents' displeasure at LNHAs' resistance to assimilating into the formal humanitarian system (e.g. by not adhering to its normative values and expectations). For example, one UN respondent asserted that local NGOs are not very good at profiling themselves (poor logos, inconsistent branding, etc.), noting that lack of investment in their communications capacity was important in attracting donors. Yet local NGOs feel they have been underrepresented in communications stemming from their partnerships with international actors: it has been reported that LNGOs stated their names and logos were mentioned in only 50% of project reports prepared by INGOs (COAST, 2018). Moreover, a local organisation could well prioritise communicating with refugees, their employees, and members of the host community over branding or increasing visibility to donors. This links back to the lack of a shared understanding of capacity in the humanitarian sector, and how different perceptions of what elements of capacity are critical results in subjective assessments of capacity gaps.

Questions were also raised about LNHAs' capacity to partner, which links to organisational capacity, and power to define the terms of partnership. For example, respondents noted that some local NGOs lacked strategic vision, their expertise had been diluted as they take on a broader spread of programmes, and they lack accountability because they do not carry out processes like procurement akin to international actors. While issues around accountability and communication are indeed important, such comments reflect a propensity for international actors to dictate the terms of engagement to local NGOs, and to criticise their capacity when they fail to meet individual organisations' norms and standards. This is far from new, but is nevertheless surprising given the World Humanitarian Summit, the Grand Bargain and extensive dialogue around localisation.

The discussion of technical or operational capacity above provides a grounding for discussion of the factors that enabled or undermined capacity from being actualised, including trust, risk, politics, access and partnerships discussed later in the report. The extent to which understandings and discussion of capacity have become inseparable from discussion of localisation is striking (explored in Chapter 4), with a 'them versus us' narrative underpinning much of the discourse around localisation and capacity in Cox's Bazar. Perhaps most noticeable is the extent to which respondents' focus was on capacity for individual or organisational stakeholders to meet their own perceived needs (for funding, status, recognition, etc.), rather than capacity to meet the evolving needs of Rohingya refugees. This was true for both international and national actors, and indicates a pressing need to ensure discussion, resources and efforts to 'improve' capacity in humanitarian response is ultimately focused on meeting the needs of those affected by crisis.

3.3 Capacity assessment and capacity strengthening

On an organisational or partnership level in Cox's Bazar, the primary mechanism respondents described for responding to 'insufficient capacity' was training. Respondents described training ranging from core organisational capacities (such as financial and other management), to humanitarian response (including humanitarian principles, refugee response), and technical skills (such as protection, gender or cash-based programming). These generally aligned with what respondents identified as gaps in the response.

While a few INGO respondents reflected on the need to strengthen their own capacity to be effective, training was primarily described as being offered to or requested by local NGOs, and provided by national or international actors.

UN agencies interviewed framed capacity strengthening as something that was needed for others, not their own organisations. To identify the extent to which LNGOs were involved in assessing the capacity of international partners, the question was included in a survey conducted by the Coastal Association for Social Transformation Trust (COAST) (2018: 3) among NGOs in Cox's Bazar – 70% of the LNGO respondents said they had never been involved in the capacity assessment of any INGO. Such imbalance reinforces the assumption that capacity is lacking at a local level, and leaves little space for a critical evaluation of capacity within international organisations. In the absence of any mechanisms in the response to the refugee situation in Cox's Bazar to assess overall capacity and identify gaps in a collegiate way, it is difficult to understand how a humanitarian response could be implemented that is as local as possible and as international as necessary.

Capacity assessments – primarily focused on operational capacity – often form part of the partnership selection process undertaken by international actors. One interview respondent described how a UN agency involved in the response had managed their capacity selection and strengthening in Cox's Bazar. The process was led by a consultant and donor driven team (compromised entirely of international members) who selected criteria (including length of experience working in the area and sound management), then shortlisted 15 NGOs operating in Cox's Bazar against those criteria. About half of those shortlisted were then chosen to be partners, and underwent training on humanitarian principles, since many NGOs did not necessarily have knowledge of this or experience in refugee response. Other training included management practices and gender sensitivity, and six months after the start of their contracts they were given refresher courses. This approach is unsurprising: it reflects how many INGOs and UN agencies assess and select their local partners. The top-down nature of such processes can, however, limit the role of LNHAAs in determining their own needs regarding capacity strengthening and result in a limited understanding of the full scope of what local actors stand to contribute to humanitarian response. Moreover,

by not considering LNHAAs alongside international partners, such capacity assessments often fail to highlight areas – such as value for money – that are likely to reflect favourably for LNHAAs.

Furthermore, emphasis on training as the primary form of capacity strengthening is problematic. It is based on a large assumption that international actors have the capacity to capacitate (i.e. that they can effectively strengthen the capacity of LNHAAs). The technocratic approach of assessing what does not meet predetermined standards and proposing changes to improve or fix this exists under the guise of 'apolitical and largely value-free' capacity development, when in fact it privileges particular ways of operating (Denny et al., 2015) in the humanitarian sector. This way of working is largely determined by international standards, norms and organisations, and tends to overlook existing and context-specific ways of approaching a crisis, including the distinctive identity and value of LNHAAs. As one respondent from an INGO said:

LNGOs are efficient in local resource mobilisation but they do not [have] enough capacity in dealing with INGOs formally. It is high time for the INGOs to provide training for the LNGO regarding these issues. LNGOs and NGOs are really weak in documentation, data processing and summarisation. Poor communication skill is another problem of them. If LNGOs can overcome these drawbacks, I am really hopeful a better complementarity between INGOs and Local NGOs will emerge.

There was little sense in our research that international stakeholders felt they should learn from or adapt to Bangladeshi partners, rather, it was often a question of how LNGOs could fit into international processes and reporting commitments, with training used as a tool to try and propel local organisations from where they were to where they needed to be to interface with international organisations. However, more equitable humanitarian response and partnerships could well entail national and local actors strengthening the capacity of international actors to participate in a particular response through training in local language, technical expertise, contextual knowledge, cultural understanding and more.

Some respondents believed that LNHAAs had broadly improved as a result of working in the response and receiving technical support and capacity strengthening from INGOs. Yet not all INGOs provided capacity support to their partners, and others provided it in an ad hoc manner; as one respondent from an INGO

said, ‘Any capacity-building we do is very haphazard but we’re looking to do more’ (INGO interview).¹³ There is a need for capacity assessments and capacity strengthening activities to be linked, in order to ensure training is not supply-driven and that actors’ capacity is strengthened to respond to identified gaps and needs.

That said, a more fundamental issue with training as the primary mechanism for capacity strengthening is that it fails to address structural problems that inhibit capacity development in the first place (Christoplos, 2005). Patel (2017: 28) highlights broader challenges around the ultimate aim of ‘capacity building’, noting ‘It is not clear whose capacity is being built for what, how individual or team capacities would translate into institutional capacities, what we would expect to see (also in terms of changing roles and responsibilities when capacity is there) if it is successful, and how organisations can resolve the problem of maintaining capacity once it has been built’. Such challenges resonate with our findings from Bangladesh, where respondents discussed a wide range of training, but no mechanisms to measure its efficacy, impact on trainees or humanitarian response. The efficacy of short-term interventions (such as training) intended to strengthen capacity will be limited in countries such as Bangladesh while structural problems (such as factors that constrain capacity) persist. In the case of this research, awareness raising and training would do little to shift the factors (such as restrictive government policies, risk, trust, funding, and willingness) we identified as enabling or undermining capacity. Lastly, in a country like Bangladesh where capacity strengthening of LNHAs has been happening for decades (Patel, 2017), there is a need for far greater accountability and openness regarding the efficacy of capacity strengthening efforts, including analysis into what has worked, what capacity strengthening efforts have failed to meet their objectives, and why.

3.4 Factors affecting if and how capacity is actualised

In the introduction, we propose a broad definition of capacity that highlighted both the actual and potential contributions made by individuals and organisations. For a number of reasons – access to funding being a common one – existing capacity in a context may not contribute to humanitarian outcomes because it is

cannot be actualised or operationalised. Ultimately, the indefinite nature of crisis and the political sensitivity in Bangladesh around the presence of Rohingya refugees constrains what capacity is actualised for both local and international actors. A more comprehensive understanding of capacity would need to recognise that it exists in two distinct forms: first, capacity that can be seen because it is actualised (this could be identified through operational mapping of interventions, monitoring and evaluation), and second, potential capacity (which is less visible and harder to measure) that exists within organisations and actors on the ground but that is not contributing to the response (for example, because of limited access or other restrictions). Finally, a better understanding of capacity would need to identify the factors affecting the actualisation of capacity, which will vary given the different nature of each humanitarian crisis and response. This section offers reflections on this in the context of Cox’s Bazar.

Gaps in humanitarian response are often linked to a lack of capacity among participating NGOs. Yet the link between shortcomings in a response and lack of capacity among responders becomes tenuous when problems can be attributed to restrictive policies or sociopolitical dynamics that prevent capacity from being actualised. Cash is a good example in the response to Rohingya refugees. Evidence supporting the use of cash as a larger part of humanitarian response is strong (ODI and CGD, 2015), as are calls among the ISCG in Cox’s Bazar to allow unrestricted cash programming in the Rohingya response (ISCG, 2018d). While ad hoc, small-scale programmes have been implemented (such as cash for work), most refugees receive in-kind aid, and a survey found 43% of refugees had been selling aid items for cash to meet their needs (Ground Truth, 2018: 1). UN agencies and INGOs in Cox’s Bazar have the resources, will and experience to implement cash programmes; they have trained some LNHAs to strengthen their capacity in cash-based programming, whilst some already had experience with cash transfers as part of poverty reduction interventions. The Government of Bangladesh has not allowed large-scale cash assistance programmes for refugees, and restrictions on refugees owning SIM cards would pose implementation challenges (for example, with mobile money transfers) even if it were allowed. Thus, while capacity to implement cash programmes exists in Cox’s Bazar, resistance from national stakeholders has prevented this capacity from being actualised.

13 Although this was not raised by interview respondents or peer reviewers, Refugees International (2018: 18) notes that ‘capacity building is not recognized as a priority activity in granting FD7 [Foreign Donations Forms] permits. According to one humanitarian familiar with this issue, “A number of NGOs have reported that they attempted to include capacity building budgets in their FD7 proposals and the NGO Affairs Bureau subsequently asked them to remove it.” This not only affects the quality of services but also makes it difficult to keep commitments set forth in the Grand Bargain on the localization of aid.’

Asking ‘why’ when considering capacity is likely to expose the intrinsic motivation around willingness of different actors to engage (or resist) actualising various capacities related to humanitarian response. For example, many LNHA and international organisations have capacity to advocate, but have been cautious in their advocacy in Cox’s Bazar, particularly in the early months of the response. Perceived risks surrounding access and power have led some NGOs to self-censor, and lack of cohesive and firm advocacy has arguably contributed to the persistence of restrictive government policies that NGOs try to work within and around; as one INGO respondent said, ‘The only way to bring pressure to bear is through a joint approach on such issues. It didn’t happen’ (INGO interview). This was not necessarily because NGOs did not have the capacity to adopt a joint advocacy approach; rather, it is more likely because it was deemed risky rather than strategic or timely.

3.5 Conclusion

Though it seems obvious that NGOs have a range of capacities that they choose to deploy or withhold, such strategy is often masked by a focus on technical aspects of capacity, rather than restrictive policies, self-censorship, or other

factors that affect whether capacity is actualised. Thus, a challenge with asserting that a stakeholder (most often an LNHA) lacks ‘x’ capacity is that lack of capacity is attributed in isolation from the structural and sociopolitical dynamics that undermine or enable the actualisation of capacity. The notion of capacity as objective or technical delinked from context, relationships and politics does little to improve our understanding of how perceptions, risk, trust and leadership affect which actors contribute to better humanitarian outcomes and why. Understanding capacity alone is of limited use, and understanding how different capacities should be organised in a strategic and complementary way can improve the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian action. This would entail the very difficult task of building consensus around what capacities are needed to meet the needs of affected populations in line with international standards, how capacities should be assessed and prioritised in a given context, and working in more equitable partnerships to implement a humanitarian response that is as local as possible and as international as necessary. Understanding existing capacity in a given response also requires going beyond capacity assessments based on demonstrable technical skills to assess the contextual factors that prevent important response capacity from ever being actualised.

4 Complementarity in Cox's Bazar

In this paper, complementarity is understood to mean an outcome where all capacities at local, national, regional and international levels are harnessed and combined in a way that plays to the strengths of the individual organisations, in order to support the best humanitarian outcomes for affected communities. Therefore, there are several factors to consider in the context of Cox's Bazar when assessing how organisations may or may not work well together. Each crisis context will have its own dynamics between humanitarian actors. Indeed, significant factors, examined in the previous section, include the different ways capacity is defined, the perceptions of the level of capacity, where capacity exists and where it is lacking and how different elements of capacity are prioritised by different actors. All of these will affect how organisations and actors will collaborate. In addition, the context of Bangladesh, and the manner in which this instance of mass displacement has developed, further constrains or enables complementarity between local, national, regional and international actors.

4.1 How far is complementarity happening?

As recognised in the stakeholder mapping, there is a great diversity of actors that are contributing to the humanitarian response in Cox's Bazar. The interactions between refugees, host communities, local and national organisations, the government, INGOs and UN agencies dictate how complementary the response can be, and the reports of engaging with other groups have proved to be as diverse as the responders themselves. In assessing these relationships, it should first be noted that many of the basic characteristics needed for a complementary response appear to be in place. As this section will detail, there are partnerships and coordination structures, although such interactions and forums are necessary but insufficient for a complementary approach. More importantly, there is at least a common recognition of the value of working collaboratively among local and international actors.

This is partly a consequence of both the scale of the crisis and the role of the government and LNHA. The government-led coordination system is clearly strong compared to others previously encountered by many international interviewees. National authorities challenge the international system and its assumptions frequently, and have a relatively strong capacity in delivering aid directly and providing services. Just as importantly, the authorities' own framing of the crisis has had a considerable impact on the response itself. The political stance of the government has been split between a desire to help provide life-saving relief to the fleeing Rohingya, while discouraging permanent settlement or integration due to concerns over resources and perceived threats to national security. Its position toward the international system has been much the same of many host governments, vocally advocating for both increased funds and control over the response, as well as calling for a greater 'sharing of the burden' from the international community. What differs in this context is the strength of the government's advocacy and control, thus dictating much of how the coordination system functions and the prospects of a complementary response.

This is matched by a vibrant civil society and local-level humanitarian response community. It has disbursed relief, including from but not limited to large international actors. More prominently, the networks representing these national responders have been vocal in their advocacy. The presence of the Cox's Bazar CSO Forum and other groups in international fora means calls for greater localisation have received a high degree of prominence, drawing upon international commitments such as the Grand Bargain to hold signatories to account. According to LNHA, they fulfil a vital function in facilitating relations between an increasingly hostile host community and the Rohingya, and advocate for international responders to supply the former with humanitarian relief supplies as well as protecting the human rights of the latter. Despite this, calls for localisation from such groups have also come with

demands for repatriation of the refugees, pressuring both INGOs and the government (CXB-CSO, 2017: 6).

The impact of this strong government and active civil society network on the international humanitarian system is ambiguous. On the one hand, despite much recent rhetoric around more 'localised' responses to crises, the international humanitarian sector operates in Cox's Bazar using a similar range of partnership and capacity-strengthening models used in other crisis contexts, therefore 'internationalising' the response through replacing local and national capacities and establishing its own coordination structures. Yet in the Cox's Bazar context, while a 'comprehensive' response may be in place for the programmes and many of the coordination structures of the international system, the national government also plays a key role in coordination and driving complementarity and active civil society networks and local organisations assertively push a localisation agenda (Van Brabant and Patel, 2018a: 63). As a result, international actors often express concern regarding what these dynamics have meant for the provision of many aid services, as well as their implications for the safety of the refugees. As such, Cox's Bazar could also be considered to be a 'constrained' model of a humanitarian response, with an 'uneasy complementarity' between those at work there (Ramalingam and Mitchell, 2014: 29).

4.1.1 Partnerships

For most actors in Cox's Bazar, the most significant interactions with others were through partnerships, and the majority of respondents working for local and international organisations viewed these as being important. Few reported working entirely in isolation, and most interviewees were engaged in partnerships of some kind across a broad range of sectors. What constituted a 'partnership', however, varied and most 'partnerships' – commonly understood as a formal, bilateral relationship between an INGO and an LNHA – display much the same characteristics as seen in other responses. Organisations still mostly partner with others that share their ways of working and, to an extent, look like them. International organisations readily partner with each other, and there was broad consensus that such relationships worked well. Conversely, local organisations also have good working relationships with one another, and collaborate on political advocacy. But while such practices led to seemingly effective service provision on a sectoral level for INGOs, they tended to exclude certain actors, usually LNHAs.

The extent of partnerships that engaged LNHAs varied, with some INGOs working entirely through

local organisations, providing a leadership and coordination role at a national or regional level but having minimal visibility at the level of delivery. The commonly cited reasons for this include simple cost-effectiveness, often due to a lack of pre-crisis presence. This is the case for a regional NGO who, despite having worked in Cox's Bazar on typhoon response for many years, cite cost among the reasons why they have worked through partnerships heavily in the Rohingya response. For others, such as Christian Aid, the choice to work through local organisations is a matter of policy. Their approach, in which multiple LNHA partners lead healthcare and water and sanitation projects in the camps whilst they adopted a more site management role, mirrors the usual dynamics of partnerships, with an INGO in more of a leadership position. But they, along with many INGO respondents, were also clear in detailing the strengths of LNHAs in such an arrangement, and where their capacities lie. Contextual knowledge, the ability to recruit large numbers of staff and volunteers quickly, easy access to camps and the ability to navigate domestic politics were recognised as being stronger among LNHAs than their INGO counterparts. Crucially, such qualities proved vital in the rapidly worsening humanitarian context of Cox's Bazar, where the speed of the response, though imperfect, was credited as having avoided mass food shortages (ISCG, 2018). Although the dynamics of these partnerships often ended up looking the same as commonly observed in such crises, they appeared to be built on an accurate recognition of the capacities of each actor.

While there were some instances of partnerships that suggest a complementary response was conducted, the norm is still that of straightforward sub-contracting and not, from the perspective of the INGO partner, 'requiring' any kind of leadership role for the local partners. However, this is occurring within a context where LNHAs are calling for a more locally led humanitarian response, with the demotion of long-standing LNHAs to that of 'mere implementing partners' a key concern of local advocacy networks (CCNF/COAST, 2018: 2). Respondents from across the sector also cite this as an issue, arguing the capacities of LNHAs are frequently underestimated and they should have a meaningful participatory role in influencing the priorities of partnerships. Some respondents expressed a concern that a lack of local NGO involvement in decision-making in partnerships impacted coordination and efficiency. But others said such unequal partnerships also widened the gaps in both day-to-day working practices and longer-term goals of national and internationally-led responses.

Box 3: Coordination between UN agencies

Further barriers to greater complementarity are present within coordination structures themselves. Despite the near-universal recognition of the scale of needs, it is notable that there is still the same sense of jostling for position among the different actors involved in the response as in smaller humanitarian crises. This has manifested itself most clearly in the relationship between IOM and UNHCR. As a result of IOM being instructed by the Bangladeshi Government to lead the Rohingya response since 2013, the agency has a larger than usual implementation role and this has resulted in an overlapping mandate with UNHCR that nominally performs a leadership role in refugee crises. The consequences of this overlap were frequently

raised in interviews and considered by most interviewees to be detrimental to the response. Respondents reported that coordination structures and information-sharing initiatives continue to be hampered by this division. Even smaller disagreements, such as which agency will chair certain meetings, contribute to an atmosphere of mutual distrust that limits the potential for joint advocacy and longer-term, conflict-sensitive programming (DEC, 2018: 28). Though responsibilities are now more clearly defined on an area basis, reports that shelter kits included different materials depending on whether the camp was run by IOM or UNHCR resulted in a 'general sense of inequality in service provision' (Sullivan, 2018: 15).

Through not engaging with more strategic-level issues, they were lessening the prospects of greater complementarity over time.

4.1.2 Coordination

Effective coordination constitutes an important foundation for a complementary response: it can create a shared understanding of needs and context, provide an overview of the various capacities of different actors and organise responses that play into their respective strengths. While there is coordination present in Cox's Bazar, particularly among INGOs, the manner in which various mechanisms were established and continue to operate mean they offer only limited opportunities for supporting complementarity, particularly between local and international actors. This is primarily a result of government and UN agencies both leading their own groups of actors that look to them for strategic direction and coordination, leading to two effectively parallel coordination structures (see Figure 2).

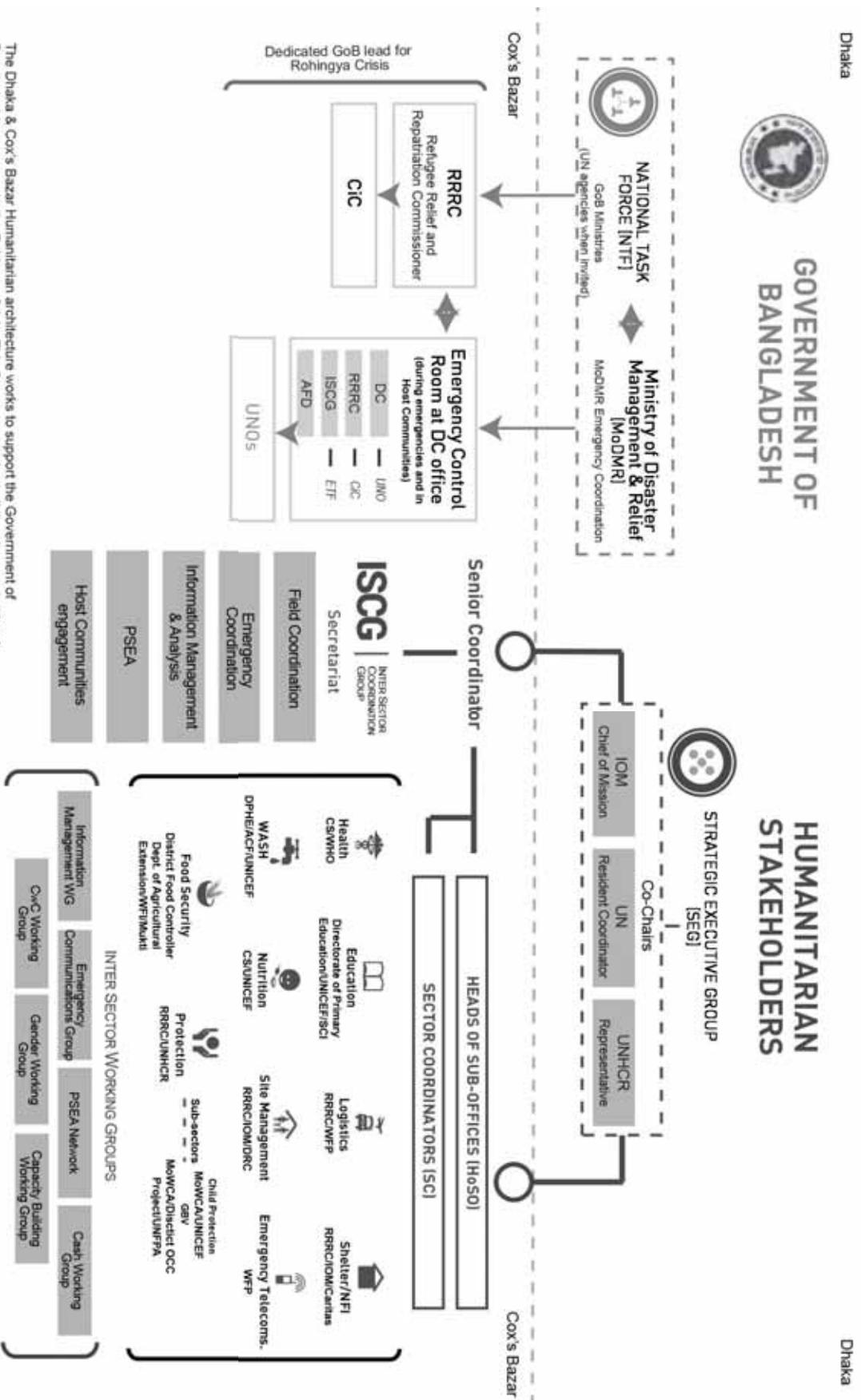
For the internationally-led system, the ISCG working groups are the primary means of coordination on a sector basis, and are led at the national level by the Strategic Executive Group comprising representatives of IOM, UNHCR and the UN Resident Coordinator, and is also the primary representative for UNDP. These bodies oversee a number of technical working groups on education and other sectors, divided into similar groups to a standard cluster system (ISCG, 2018: 34). There are also eight operational inter-sector working groups, including on cash, gender and the host community. Following the monsoon season, it was agreed that this coordination structure would be reviewed in order to 'enable the different national

and international stakeholders in the Bangladesh refugee operation to work together more effectively in pursuit of common goals': a recognition that the current coordination models are not enabling a complementary response (UNICEF, 2018: 2).

The Government of Bangladesh also operates a number of coordination structures, starting at the national level, with the National Task Force comprising a range of line ministries. On a sub-national level, the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner of the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief leads operational coordination in tandem with the Deputy Commissioner's office in Cox's Bazar, although the level of the latter's operational involvement was disputed and these authorities were described as being 'not always on the same page' by one respondent. The prominence of such an authority however is also symbolic, as the Commissioner's Office has a primary role in the response for the host community. At the level of the camps themselves, management and coordination is the responsibility of government officials known as Camps in Charge. For many INGOs, the most prominent government entity was the NGO Affairs Bureau, which leads the approval process for the FD6 and FD7 forms necessary for organisations to operate in the camp.

Political dynamics between the government and international organisations, and between organisations themselves, has led to coordination structures that do not display the typical configuration of a refugee response. For example, IOM has a significant front-line delivery role, and although sector coordinators mirror much of the OCHA cluster

Figure 2: Coordination structures in the Rohingya response at national and local level



The Dhaka & Cox's Bazar Humanitarian architecture works to support the Government of Bangladesh's response to the Rohingya Crisis. This Support extends at all the above noted levels in both Dhaka and Cox's Bazar.

Source: ISCG, 2018: 17

template there is no early recovery cluster, usually led by UNDP. Respondents had a range of views of the effectiveness of these structures, with some describing the levels of coordination as confusing and overlapping for both LNHA and even INGOs. Others blamed a lack of emphasis on protection as a product of agencies with non-protection mandates in leading roles, with one respondent expressing concerns that the lack of a prominent role for OCHA has led to an increasing 'monopolisation' of the response by the largest UN agencies. Between them, the two agencies comprised 38% of the requested \$950.8 million in the 2018 Joint Response Plan (FTS, 2018).

While such an arrangement does not necessarily diminish the potential for complementary, some interviewees cite the lack of contact between these two structures as being detrimental to an effective response. One respondent described the situation as comprising 'two worlds' with differing languages, standards, ways of working, relationships and priorities – as well as each having its own politics and contradictions to navigate. Some respondents cited 'huge confusion' on the part of local – and some international – NGOs regarding who to deal with in such structures. Organisations in each group need to work with the government and the international system to some extent: the government provides certification and controls access, while the international system provides financial resources to many actors. But the division of these functions does not appear to have forged closer or more coordinated working practices, and has allowed some exclusionary practices to develop that leave out the capacities of both groups of relief actors.

The main underrepresented group in coordination structures remains LNHA, whose capacities in this response are not limited to delivery and access, as is usually assumed, but extend to more contextually-relevant technical skills and political knowledge. The local NGOs interviewed had a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of local government and this has elevated some in importance, despite their side-lining in INGO-led coordination mechanisms. The particular political affiliations of key government representatives, the differences in working between civil servants and elected officials, and the relative strengths of government ministries were cited by some respondents as being areas where LNHA have had a greater capacity than internationals and which they had utilised in the response. Rather than acting as intermediaries between local-level 'sub-contractors' and the host government, some LNHA

took on a more autonomous role in meetings, with interviewees reporting that, when internationally-led actors had finished their meetings with government, their present national partners would stay on and continue discussions in Bengali. In a response whose parameters are often laid out by a strong government, LNHA – and especially their leaders – were often clearly powerful actors, and far from passive sub-contractors

Generally, internationally led coordination mechanisms tend to exclude LNHA through a lack of decision-making power or meaningful participation. In Bangladesh this appears to be the case, with fewer LNHA represented in coordination mechanisms compared to the numbers of those operating on the ground. For those present in such meetings, familiar problems such as English being used as a default working language mean the dominance of INGOs is preserved and inputs from local organisations are limited. There has also been a proliferation of working groups that, although theoretically providing a forum for greater LNHA input into coordination, tend to favour the largest agencies that possess the resources to regularly attend such meetings. Although international respondents recognise these dynamics, the trend toward greater engagement with LNHA has stalled and the composition of these coordination structures appears increasingly entrenched. At the beginning of 2018, half of the 40 national-level NGOs were reported as being 'present and active in coordination mechanisms'. By August 2018, just one more national NGO was reported as such (ISCG, 2018: 82). Yet while LNHA are not commonly present in the coordination structures, their heavy presence in the camps themselves means the risk of duplicated responses remains high.

There is coordination present in Cox's Bazar, particularly among INGOs. But the manner in which the various mechanisms were established and continue to operate mean they do not support complementarity between local and international actors. At a minimum, coordination should minimise duplication, but this is prevalent in both the provision of relief and basic issues around camp management. Multiple respondents, for example, noted the parallel zoning of the camps that has developed, with government-led responders using names and boundaries of villages that have now been subsumed by the camp and the international sector using an alphabetised system. This example of duplication demonstrates that the parallel system of coordination presents a significant barrier to greater complementarity.

Finally, in these camps and at the centre of the crisis are the Rohingya themselves, with their own voices at risk of being crowded out by both international and local actors. Their capacities have not been harnessed by many responders, partly due to restrictive government policies on access and employment: a key element needed for a ‘complementary’ response that is not present. It is also important to note that, for the Rohingya, a response dominated by Bangladeshi LNHA does not necessarily constitute a ‘local’ one from the refugees’ perspective, owing to different cultural practises and needs and a language that, although similar, is not completely compatible (Van Brabant and Patel, 2018a: 64). Indeed, some interview responses tacitly suggested that, with local NGOs now effectively advocating for a more ‘localised’ response that takes into account the needs of the host community, it is up to the INGOs to advocate for the needs of the Rohingya.

Despite these issues, many interviewees from across the sector talked positively about relationships with other organisations and the support they received. Respondents framed such examples as complementary, in that the relative strengths of each party played an important role in these partnerships and interactions. Specific examples of coordinated operations tended to focus on technical programmes, including engineering works carried out jointly by UN agencies and government, and forestry management, where joint assessments and programmes that assessed the impact of deforestation on forest elephants, led by UNHCR, local government and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), were judged to have drawn on relative strengths of the parties involved. However, these technical programmes were not well connected to formal coordination mechanisms, and appeared to be as much a product of ad hoc, smaller cross-organisational teams developed for specific projects. Yet such examples were promising in light of the substantial engineering challenges involved in the monsoon preparations, and rare cross-sectoral cases of bridging the gap between the two parallel coordination structures.

4.1.3 Conclusion

Overall, Cox’s Bazar does not present an especially convincing picture of a complementary response. Although the position and strength of the government means that a ‘negotiation’ around access and the types of programmes provided is necessary for international actors to work there, the capacities of LNHA do not appear to be reflected in many current ways of working or partnership arrangements (HAG, 2017). It appears that any instances of complementarity

have occurred despite, rather than been facilitated by, overly complex and exclusionary coordination mechanisms, with the way in which they operate not conducive toward a complementary approach. Despite the considerable range of partnerships, coordination structures and isolated and technical instances of complementary initiatives, this has not galvanised wider programming into harnessing and combining capacities to support the best humanitarian outcomes.

4.2 What factors hinder complementarity?

What lies behind the split between government-led and UN-led coordination structures and many current practices in partnerships that hinder a complementary response in Cox’s Bazar? They are symptoms of underlying causes that touch on broader questions around politics, financing and attitudes of the various parties involved in the response.

4.2.1 A lack of trust and low tolerance for risk

Crucial deficits in trust and risk undermine many interactions between those involved in the response, and affect their capacity to respond. Trust was noted to be particularly low between INGOs and the government. From the perspective of the former, this is at least partly a result of the government’s assertive stance against INGOs, including barring some aid organisations from operating in the camps and dictating what specific aid is allowed in. Although INGO respondents were broadly sympathetic to the position of the government and many LNHA in Cox’s Bazar – including that the host community is overwhelmed and is in just as much need as the refugees themselves – their mandates and restrictions mean they are limited in the scope of their work. The government is wary of a heavy INGO presence, particularly one that would encourage permanent settlement of the refugee population and being blind to what it sees as a very real security risk of radicalisation within the camps.

Trust deficits were also in evidence when assessing partnerships between INGOs and LNHA. Respondents from both groups highlighted the importance of trust, noting that it took sufficiently long to build that it was still too early to assess newer partners in this response. INGOs with a pre-crisis presence felt at an advantage in this regard, with large ‘local’ NGOs like BRAC frequently cited as partners because they are known to have the required

capacities and processes in place. Conversely, the risks involved with partnering with an ‘unproven’ organisation (expressed by INGOs in the form of financial and legal liabilities to donors or isolated examples of aid diversion and corruption) were also a substantial barrier. Some INGO respondents accepted that their organisation’s risk tolerance was too low, and prevented them forming more equitable partnerships. But several senior INGO respondents saw their agencies’ key strengths as delivering large amounts of relief to high standards, across their partners; any further shift in power toward LNHA would mean large investments in their staff engaging in quality control functions to ensure standards remain acceptable. Since some LNHA lack this capacity at present, the risk that relief may not be provided to the standard set by INGOs and donors was considered too high. Such views are consistent with previous studies that note a ‘tension’ between international commitments to support local capacity and ‘increasing demands for quality, scale and contractual compliance and risk’ (Poole, 2014).

4.2.2 Divergent objectives

Underlying much of the trust deficit is the fact that many actors present in the response are often pursuing different objectives. The host government, for example, is arguing for short-term relief and rapid repatriation of refugees, as well as greater inclusion of affected host communities in relief provision. As a result, prominent LNHA support these goals, with much of their advocacy and programme approaches focused on aid localisation and the burden of refugees on the local area. In contrast, many international actors are advocating for better support to refugees including the need for cash programming, longer-term support and the protection of refugee rights, in particular against forced repatriation. The continued impasse is fundamentally a result of the structures being accountable to different people. The UN-led system is accountable to international donors who want to see the mitigation of a refugee crisis, and while the nationally-led system shares this goal, it is also more accountable to the host community and so must balance the interests of these groups. Given these competing objectives, it is difficult to see how government actors, local civil society and international actors can in fact work in a complementary manner. Truly engaging with the consequences of what ‘complementarity’ means in this context is perhaps the most significant dilemma that an international community that has committed to supporting local humanitarian action needs to resolve.

This has impacted relief provision. For INGOs, this means that many of their capacities go unharnessed. Multiple INGOs cite their expertise as being in the sectors of livelihoods and education, but both are heavily restricted in the camps in Bangladesh. One key example is mobile money, now commonly used across a range of conflict and displacement settings by organisations present in the camps including UNHCR and the Red Cross/Crescent Movement (UNHCR, 2018d). Allowing users to receive, manage and send money on a mobile phone offers users greater autonomy as well as multiplier effects beyond the programme’s initial recipients (Slim et al., 2018). However, government restrictions on sim cards for refugees in the camps means this option is limited. Another example is in education, with government restrictions meaning education activities, where they do exist, need to be taken in English and Burmese, rather than Bangla, and without the use of the national curriculum (ISCG, 2018: 37). INGOs expressed frustration that these programming approaches, which could contribute to alleviating the growing perception of hostility between host communities and refugees and offer opportunities for economic and social integration, cannot currently be implemented because the government will not allow any suggestion of permanence. The lack of resolution of this political split has also affected other actors. Whilst the technical nature of the few complementary projects means they avoid confronting political divisions, it also limits the influence of many LNHA to their traditional role of service providers, at least in programmes involving international relief actors.

4.2.3 Funding to LNHA

The dynamics of funding remain one of the largest barriers to building a more complementary response. While no organisation is financially independent from international donors, LNHA’s dependence on INGOs or UN agencies as donors through partnerships maintains unequal power dynamics. In 2016 many donors and international organisations signed the ‘Grand Bargain’ on funding that included a commitment to channel more funding as directly as possible to national and local responders. While for INGOs, funding was rarely mentioned as a barrier in Cox’s Bazar, it was frequently raised as an obstacle for a more effective response by LNHA. Their financial independence is still minimal, with a sense from interviewees that the response has reverted to type and that the Grand Bargain commitments have not had an especially strong impact in channelling funding directly to local responders.

This is particularly significant considering the size of initial funding, with the 2017 response plan being better funded than most at 73% of the requested level, or \$316.9 million (OCHA, 2018). With the 2018 Joint Response Plan requesting \$950.8 million, 72% is currently reported funded (SEG, 2018: 10; FTS, 2018). Of this \$679.9 million, just \$4.8 million, or 0.7%, has been committed or distributed to a destination organisation based in Bangladesh: a decrease from 2.3% for 2017 (FTS, 2018). Though this does not present the entire scope of funding to LNHAAs, as many will be sub-contracted by INGOs, it indicates a lack of funding independence that frustrated some LNHA respondents. Their demands for their own \$4 million fund, governed by a steering committee comprising the Resident Coordinator and other LNHAAs that would be intended for supplying the smaller amounts of funding needed, have so far not been taken forward. Several INGO representatives reported LNHAAs' access to so-called 'pooled funds', but these tend to be run by INGOs, somewhat reinforcing the power dynamics of the current 'partnership' models. Initiatives such as the Start Fund, intended to drive forward the localisation agenda, have yet to disburse funding to local actors in Bangladesh this year, and the small initiatives that do exist, such as a \$5 million UNDP scheme for capacity-strengthening LNHAAs, do not fundamentally alter the fact that increased investment for capacity without increasing opportunities for organisations to access direct funding is a key issue in hindering a more complementary approach.

INGOs seeking to provide greater funding to LNHAAs were faced with a number of barriers. Beyond the limited amount of funding, long-standing constraints, such as funds needing to be spent within a certain timeframe, were blamed as being detrimental to the prospects of greater LNHA involvement in direct funding access. There were barriers even for those in partnership with LNHAAs, the primary restriction faced by INGOs in transferring funds into the country being the requirement for FD6 and FD7 permits, issued by the government and also affecting other issues such as camp access. The reported turnaround time for such permits is on the scale of weeks and months, restricting the transfer of money for local partners. While physical cash can be brought in, the risks and scale of this option limit this channel.

These particular restrictions in Cox's Bazar compound long-standing funding problems for LNHAAs in most crisis contexts: that funding is only available as part of a partnership arrangement, and such funding often only constitutes 'direct operating

costs' that fails to cover core costs (Van Brabant and Patel, 2018a: 62). This presents a challenge for complementarity; existing power dynamics between INGOs and LNHAAs are maintained and available resources for local organisations to build capacities are limited. Not only does funding present an issue now, but maintaining this status quo is likely to lead to LNHA capacities being adversely impacted by reductions in their only source of funding in the event of the crisis becoming protracted.

4.2.4 The nature of partnerships and staff

Besides funding, some respondents saw other barriers to a more complementary response in how partnerships were carried out. Several INGO respondents saw the scale of the crisis as making equitable partnerships and greater complementarity more difficult. They argued that, with a large and desperate refugee population arriving very rapidly in a context where space is at a premium, any partnerships were founded on 'the wrong priorities', namely focusing on swift delivery of relief rather than a shared understanding of the context and longer-term objectives. The speed needed in the response has also been blamed on the division of labour in the camps, with some overseen by UNHCR and others IOM (Sullivan, 2018: 15). Yet with humanitarian contexts always being difficult to work in, needs extensive and decisions needing to be made quickly, effective communication and engagement with other actors to create a shared understanding of objectives must be made a high priority.

For LNHAAs, unequal power dynamics also manifested themselves in INGO and UN attitudes to staffing. As is common to many humanitarian crises, most humanitarian staff are from the host country (ISCG, 2018: 33). This includes a large number of staff from smaller organisations that have moved to larger international agencies, taking their capacity with them. Whether issues of staffing or 'poaching' are seen as necessarily negative is partly a consequence of whether an individual or organisational lens is applied, but most respondents that took on an organisational lens saw it as problematic. Although not restricted to LNHAAs, this issue seemed to be the most common for them, particularly in light of international actors 'capacity-strengthening' certain programme staff, who then take up other roles considered more lucrative in the UN system or INGOs. In addition, staff from INGOs with a long presence in the area also moved on following the arrival of larger international agencies. LNHA networks are more vocal, accusing all other organisations, including 'big national NGOs', of adopting an approach that 'violates the commitment to reinforce rather than replace local capacities' (CCNF/COAST, 2018: 4).

4.3 What factors support complementarity?

There are some, albeit isolated, instances of responses in Cox's Bazar that could be considered complementary, through harnessing and drawing upon capacities across a number of levels. A number of factors contributed to making this work. For some respondents, the sheer scale of humanitarian needs in the densely populated and difficult to access camps made it impossible for any single actor to respond to the crisis in isolation, and necessitated working together closely. Whether these difficult conditions necessarily drove complementarity in practice is unclear, however, with the ISCG reporting instead a 'lack of collaboration among partners operating in the same location' (2018: 64). Rather than drive actors together, larger-scale crises are instead often seen as conducive to the international humanitarian system providing rapid, wide-ranging 'comprehensive' coverage, with little room for local input (Ramalingam and Mitchell, 2014: 27; IFRC, 2015). So while the scale of needs alone may not equate with a complementary response, it is left up to key actors to drive the agenda.

4.3.1 Assertive government

If complementarity involves harnessing and combining capacities, regardless of whether such actors are local or international, then the role of the Government of Bangladesh can be considered conducive toward such an approach. The government has taken an assertive role, and its strength as a direct aid provider, policing of the camps and in advocacy efforts means it unquestionably leads the response, as argued by the ISCG (2018: 9). Through this role the government has helped drive at least a basic level of engagement between LNHA and international actors. For example, many INGOs were required to a partner with local organisations to gain access to the camps. While there were no more detailed restrictions dictating the nature of these partnerships, and there appeared to be inconsistencies in this rule being enforced, this has meant that some LNHA at least have a source of funding and link to INGO responders (Banik, 2018: 27). One LNHA interviewee cited this as being beneficial for their work, having led to a partnership with a large INGO in the camp providing sexual and reproductive health services and a corresponding expansion of their staff.

The government's assertiveness has often put it at odds with INGOs, with some respondents agreeing that the government should in theory have a strong role, while being concerned at the effects this has had in practice. Many INGOs perceive the government as a restrictive force. For example, restrictions on INGO access in

the early stages of the response were blamed by one interviewee for the state of poor contemporary camp planning, limiting the prospects for complementarity through a 'haphazard' and inconsistent understanding of which actors had responsibilities for facilities and services. Delays in approving NGO proposals, the detention of staff, and the expulsion of some INGOs have been interpreted by some INGO respondents as being purposeful tools deployed by the government to enforce their control.

Yet this assertive role has meant the response is being locally led, with the government being effective in setting the agenda. This can be seen in the speed at which various terminology has been adopted by respondent organisations: during the research for this study, Rohingya were referred to by some as Undocumented Myanmar Nationals (UMNs), and this label was adopted by many interviewees across the system. In addition, it is notable that the scope of programmes carried out jointly by both the government and international coordination structures, such as infrastructure expansion and environmental conservation, were considered critically important by government responders. While its effectiveness as a coordinator at the level of camp management was seen as low by some interviewees, the government is clearly continuing to set the boundaries of the response and as such supporting complementarity.

4.3.2 Well-networked local responders

While the capacities of LNHA in Cox's Bazar are varied, their advocacy role is prominent and is made more so as a result of their networks. As previously discussed, the UN-led system has struggled to increase LNHA representation in their coordination structures, partly leading to the formation of LNHA-led advocacy networks: a trend set by similar actors in other crisis contexts frustrated by perceived exclusion (Featherstone and Antequisa, 2014; Bennett and Foley, 2016). These bodies advocate for more localised responses and include the CCNF and the National Alliance of Humanitarian Actors in Bangladesh (NAHAB). With financial support from international donors, the stated aim of these bodies includes the fostering of better coordination. Such groups have skilfully used international-level events and initiatives, most recently at the World Bank annual meetings in October 2018, to utilise the global spotlight on Cox's Bazar and hold INGOs and donors to account on their commitments to localise (CCNF/COAST, 2018). Yet although respondents noted there has been engagement between this Forum and ISCG structures, the impact these local bodies have on coordinating programmes between themselves is less clear, as there has so far been minimal changes to how local NGOs compete for funding and partnerships.

It should also be noted that the largest Bangladeshi NGOs, chiefly BRAC and COAST, are already significant and influential international NGOs in their own right. Respondents framed these actors as occupying a powerful role, including in coordination structures. Their impact can be considered broadly positive for complementarity, as multiple respondents discussed how the working practices of BRAC and COAST mean they are an easy and effective partner and considered 'low risk', while LNHA refer to them as effective representatives and advocates for the localisation agenda. Yet the adverse effect of their dominance is that they are considered easy stand-ins in coordination mechanisms for 'local' NGOs and are often the only Bangladesh-based NGOs present. Although many LNHA representatives have good relationships with these groups, they are not seen as representative of the diverse array of local relief providers active in the camps.

4.3.3 'Capacity strengthening' and its impact on complementarity

As is common to crisis contexts, some INGOs have also invested in capacity strengthening programmes for LNHA. As previously noted, the logic behind capacity strengthening is often flawed, assuming a low level of capacities on the part of the LNHA and overly focusing on the functions dependent for future sub-contracting style partnerships with INGOs. But many LNHA respondents saw value in these initiatives, with one interviewee explaining it has allowed an expansion of the programmes they implement as well as increased visibility to potential donors.

While the consequences of staff 'poaching' may be detrimental to complementarity on an organisational level, some defended the practice and saw capacity strengthening not merely as a zero-sum equation (Christoplos, 2005). Although there is high staff turnover among humanitarian organisations, there were also perceptions from some national staff that the movement from LNHA to INGO or UN agency constituted 'natural career progression' (Featherstone, 2017). Rather than forcing organisations to downsize or disappear when the needs and resources associated with a large-scale humanitarian crisis subside, an improvement in the skills of Cox's Bazar residents was seen as a net positive that would reduce vulnerability to further humanitarian crises and increase opportunities. For one UN respondent, their experience in training Bangladeshi doctors in mental health and psychosocial support for those with severe mental and neuropsychiatric disorders, using guidelines developed by WHO and UNHCR, was a positive process of capacity strengthening whereby professionals had the opportunity to improve their skills (Tay et al., 2018: 39).

The head of one local organisation took a more holistic view on capacity-building, asserting that individuals from Cox's Bazar should be considered to be still contributing to the wellbeing of the area whether they went on to roles in business, the UN or politics.

4.4 Conclusion

Coordination or partnership does not necessarily equal complementarity, and the manner in which the response in Bangladesh was established, evolved and now operates is not especially conducive to a complementary approach. The complexity of the various coordination mechanisms has allowed parallel systems to develop that are accountable to different groups and do not have a shared set of objectives that inform their programming. Joint working and shared space do exist, and when there is a shared understanding of urgent needs or issues, such as in the technically-minded programmes mentioned in this section, both international and local organisations add to the respective strengths of the other, and coordinate their activities in small working groups. Yet these examples, and any 'complementarity' that exists between the government and the international system, tends to happen only when a shared technical issue becomes acute. When operating in the same space in their normal programming, the two groups tend to work separately. Ultimately these coordination gaps only increase the divide between nationally-led actors that emphasise the need for short-term, life-saving relief with a view for rapid repatriation and an international system seeking a response that ensures the longer-term protection of the Rohingya.

In considering such issues, it is impossible to separate them from the political reality of the Cox's Bazar context: the relationships between INGOs and government, different UN and international agencies, the local community and LNHA. This in some ways demonstrates the limits of interpreting this context through the lens of capacity and complementarity. Whilst the government of Bangladesh can use its strength to drive more 'complementary' practices, including greater power for LNHA, this does not necessarily entail 'better' provision for the Rohingya themselves. On the contrary, some of the demands made by LNHA and the government, such as using international funding intended for the Rohingya for host communities or even a continued emphasis on swift repatriation of the refugees back to Myanmar, are controversial. They present some uncomfortable conclusions in the wider context of international commitments that seek to localise responses to crises.

5 Conclusion

The current Rohingya crisis is in many ways an ideal testing ground for a more localised humanitarian response. The NGO community had a large presence in Cox's Bazar before the influx of refugees and the government of Bangladesh has demonstrated its ability and willingness to take an assertive role. It is clear that there are considerable capacities among the LNHA and Government of Bangladesh, as repeatedly demonstrated when responding to disasters. However, the needs of this refugee crisis meant the response required capacities specifically related to refugee response that arguably went beyond those that were present at a local level.

Many of these capacities are currently constrained by government restrictions that hinder access, rights and protection of the Rohingya. Indeed, rather than just a technical assessment of expertise and resources to carry out certain programmes, understanding the constraints on implementing capacities is equally important. Since the government has the capacity to control access and the types of services in the camps and has set the agenda of the response as being short-term in nature, the international system must work within those constraints. In addition to pushing for the rights of the Rohingya to be upheld, they must also focus on assisting affected host communities and finding effective ways to work with LNHA. As such, if the requirement of a complementary response would be that international organisations need to negotiate and work alongside host authorities, then the case of Bangladesh would fulfil that criteria. But the need to negotiate with and navigate a strong government is insufficient for a complementary response, and many other factors hinder its prospects.

While there are isolated examples of coordinated programmes, power dynamics identified as problematic in historical humanitarian responses (DuBois and Wake, 2015) are also seen in Bangladesh, despite its scale and commensurate resources. Competition remains high among aid providers, particularly over staffing and funding, hindering the effectiveness of coordination mechanisms. Primarily as a consequence of a complex political situation and divergent priorities, parallel coordination structures have developed, and their lack of engagement with each other has hindered the delivery of humanitarian

relief and protection services. With a lack of common understanding as to what constitutes capacity, responders tend to frame any discussions around what capacities are needed in relation to the needs of organisations, such as abilities to fundraise and report. This framing places the emphasis on LNHA to adapt to fit the model of international actors, with little evidence of a reverse process occurring.

It also tends to exclude affected people at the centre of the crisis. The priorities and perspectives of Rohingya refugees are largely missing from discussions of capacity, from influencing the humanitarian response that stands to serve them to determining what they want for their future – whether it be in Bangladesh, Myanmar or elsewhere. Questions around who is advocating for refugees' rights and perspectives, in a way that is best aligned with international norms and standards, are critical when considering capacity and complementarity in a response to forced displacement. In many disaster and conflict contexts, local actors are best placed to deliver aid that is appropriate, responsive and accountable to affected people. In a displacement response of the kind in Cox's Bazar, however, this argument becomes complicated, because while the humanitarian response is centred on the Rohingya who have sought refuge in Bangladesh, LNHA are often part of and also serve the host community, and the latter often have different perspectives from the refugees on what suitable aid and policy interventions may be. Differing views between the aspirations of host communities and some LNHA and refugees themselves highlight the need to consider context-specific challenges, based on a nuanced understanding of refugee–host relations, when advocating for more 'local' responses to forced displacement.

The response is taking place in the midst of ongoing debates as to what humanitarian responses should look like, and international commitments that aim to increase the role of LNHA. These actors in Cox's Bazar continue to demonstrate their ability to provide relief and services, and are powerful actors that can potentially play a key role in bridging the gap between parallel coordination structures. Some also support and lead local networks that, while

created ostensibly to improve coordination, have instead focused more on advocating for ‘localisation’, a term which in this context has become inseparable from any understanding of capacity and prospects of complementarity. These advocates frame the very real deficiencies in the response as being resolvable through increased ‘localisation’, insofar as it serves the agendas of LNHA; this can be problematic given that some local organisations are pressing for a swift repatriation of refugees. If the debate on localisation should move on from funding to that of determining ‘how locally based organisations can play a more active role in influencing the refugee policies pursued by states’ (Crisp, 2018; 7), then this active role is already in evidence in Cox’s Bazar, although potentially not in a manner that some in the international humanitarian sector would hope for or be comfortable with. Whether such interpretations of global commitments to make humanitarian responses more ‘locally owned and led’ is benefitting the Rohingya is currently far from clear (HAG and NIRAPAD, 2017: 10).

In defining complementarity, this study has interpreted it as an outcome where capacities at all levels are harnessed and combined in a way that plays to the strengths of the individual organisations in order to support the best humanitarian outcomes for affected communities. Despite the relatively strong role of the government and LNHA, the response cannot currently be said to be supporting the best outcomes for the Rohingya. Complementary actions between response providers, of which there are some examples, exist to the benefit of affected people, but cannot resolve the political divisions between the government, international actors, and refugees themselves. Relief and services remain limited in scope and short-term in nature, and this constitutes the primary blocker to any improvements in harnessing more capacity or fostering greater complementarity. When considering who is best placed to solve these pressing deficiencies in the response, it is necessary to go beyond technical capacities. Instead, the advocacy and diplomatic capabilities of both international and LNHA are now needed to convince the Government of Bangladesh to ease restrictions in the camps and ensure that any repatriation efforts stay off the table until conditions for return are in place in Myanmar. Ensuring a more complementary response now requires finding solutions to these complex and fundamentally political problems.

Key shifts are needed in Cox’s Bazar and beyond to improve capacity and complementarity in the

response to Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. First, more unified advocacy positions, such as that taken by many INGOs in response to the attempt to return refugees in November 2018 (Care, 2018), are needed by operational agencies in Cox’s Bazar to support refugees; importantly, this means not just better coordination of a humanitarian response focused on delivering goods and services, but supporting refugees’ self-determination and decision-making roles regarding their futures. Second, discussions around localisation in the Rohingya refugee response would be more effective if they moved away from the highly polarised positions – often based on organisational rather than humanitarian interests – held by different categories of actors, to refocus on serving Rohingya refugees and affected host communities. This will involve greater willingness to honestly and robustly assess capacities, access and context to determine responsibilities and resource distribution based on who is best placed to perform certain roles, insofar as they meet the needs of affected populations in line with international standards. Third, it is clear that those seeking resolutions to this crisis should pursue them on two parallel fronts, through focusing on improving the lives of the refugees in Bangladesh by maintaining funding to the response and advocating for greater rights and freedoms for the Rohingya, while at the same time ensuring the regional and international community hold Myanmar to account for crimes committed against the Rohingya, and press Myanmar to address the root causes of the crisis.

The above suggestions are made with full acknowledgement that the challenges implementing them are significant and, to many, the situation feels intractable. For the moment, the wider geopolitical situation remains in deadlock and an election-wary national government in Bangladesh is unlikely to ease restrictions as long as they are seen as vital to discourage permanent settlement. Yet within this constrained environment, better outcomes for Rohingya are sorely needed (DEC, 2018; Mahony, 2018). As Tomás Ojea Quintana, the former Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar (2008–14) wrote in the forward to Green et al. (2015: 14):

If we could for one moment imagine how it feels to be a young Rohingya woman, we would see the real face of our civilization: denial of their existence, health deprivation, limited access to food, confinement, the fear of rape, torture and violent death. To offer them an alternative is a legal and moral obligation we all have.

While the above quote was written before the latest violence and exodus, it remains as pertinent as ever, and is a reminder of where the focus needs to be: on the Rohingya themselves. Discussions around capacity, complementarity and localisation are only relevant insofar as they remain firmly grounded in meeting humanitarian needs and serving the needs of affected populations. Having fled crimes against humanity in Myanmar (HRW, 2018), the Rohingya in Bangladesh today live in overcrowded camps,

without freedom of movement, official refugee status, formal education, or opportunities for livelihoods or self-reliance, and face risks posed by disasters (DEC, 2018; ACAPS, 2018). As of December 2018, it appears highly likely that the displacement will be protracted (Wake and Yu, 2018). Yet rather than settling into an entrenched response based on the status quo, there is a pressing need to improve the immediate and long-term situation for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.

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