Towards ‘shared’ and ‘complex’ disaster governance in Bangladesh : the 2017 Rohingya Exodus

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2019

Cook, A. D. B., & Foo, Y. N. (2019). Towards ‘shared’ and ‘complex’ disaster governance in Bangladesh : the 2017 Rohingya Exodus. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, 39, 101233-. doi:10.1016/j.ijdr.2019.101233

<https://hdl.handle.net/10356/143385>

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdr.2019.101233>

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12 **Towards ‘Shared’ and ‘Complex’ Disaster Governance in Bangladesh:**
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1. Introduction

Bangladesh is the 10th most exposed country to natural hazards, and the fifth most at risk of an extreme natural event turning into a disaster according to the United Nations 2016 World Risk Report. The country is exposed to both slow and quick onset disasters, including annual floods¹, cyclones², salinity intrusion³, earthquakes⁴ and landslides⁵; many of which have generated significant scholarly research as noted in the citations. Natural hazards aside, the country is also at risk of emergencies stemming from political developments within and outside of the country. The Rohingya exodus that began on 25 August 2017 saw more than an estimated 723,000 people flee from Myanmar to Bangladesh.⁶ The Independent International Fact Finding Mission on Myanmar found many violations that led to the death and flight of Rohingya amount to the gravest crimes under international law and called on the international community to investigate and prosecute named Senior Generals in the Myanmar military in an international criminal tribunal for genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.⁷ While there is scholarly literature on Rohingya in Bangladesh and Myanmar, the studies are often couched in terms of a security issue,⁸ their impact on Bangladesh-Myanmar relations,⁹ the role of UNHCR policies for Rohingya in Bangladesh,¹⁰ their human rights situation when in Myanmar¹¹, the role of Faith-Based Organisations in Bangladesh and their role in governing the previous waves of Rohingya exodus in the early 1990s or late 1970s,¹² or the humanitarian response in Rakhine state in Myanmar.¹³ However, the combined issue of natural hazards and Rohingya in Bangladesh in the scholarly literature are treated separately. However, since 25 August 2017, Bangladesh is a refuge for some 646,000 additional Rohingya and displaced persons from Rakhine in Myanmar. These two literatures need to be drawn upon in our investigation of the issues facing the dual governance challenges of natural hazards and displaced populations, which can create complex humanitarian emergencies.

A range of actors, including the civilian government at all levels, security forces, international development institutions, local and international Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) are responsible for the country's disaster management. Within the national disaster management framework, under the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, is the Office of the Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRRC). This Commission has oversight over the whole refugee population. While it falls under the mandate of the MDRR, it operates largely alongside the disaster management offices. Coordination between actors in the governance of natural hazards and governance of the displaced population appears limited.

Furthermore, the involvement of other state actors, international organisations, INGOs and Local NGOs in the response to the Rohingya provides a complex governing structure. With such a diversity of actors, coordination is critical to the quality of humanitarian assistance provided to host and refugee communities. Disaster management laws, regulations and policies in Bangladesh have institutionalised civil-military coordination between the actors. These provide the framework to govern both the Rohingya response and emergency preparedness and response to natural hazards like monsoons.

This article investigates the challenges that Bangladesh faces in disaster governance, particularly since the most recent mass influx of Rohingya in 2017, by assessing how prepared the country is for disasters and how disaster response operations are conducted by state and supported by non-state actors. The 2017 Rohingya Exodus occurred against the backdrop of recovery efforts for Cyclone Mora that hit Bangladesh in May 2017 and preparations for the monsoon season, which began in April 2018 and makes it an appropriate example of the disaster governance challenges faced in a complex humanitarian emergency. It is important to assess the recent developments in Bangladesh and begin to trace the evolution of disaster governance from local to national and international actors. It is therefore incumbent upon us to draw on the works of Dorothea Hilhorst and the theory of Social Domains. Social Domains are the marketplace of idea concerning risk and disaster, where they are exchanged, shared and organised.¹⁴ Indeed, the earlier work of Russell R. Dynes on the concept of “shared governance”¹⁵ has much to offer in understanding the prospects and challenges of disaster governance in Bangladesh.

This theory moves beyond environmental change, urbanisation, and modernisation to include developments outlined above in the literature review including but not limited to securitisation, role of international science and politics.¹⁶ Indeed, the politics of governing complex humanitarian emergencies are significant when investigating the Rohingya situation in Bangladesh. For example, we see the dispute at a high political level between the two governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh disagreeing with what to call this group of people. The Bangladeshi government chose to label them as registered Myanmar National, whereas this categorisation is rejected by the Myanmar government, which in turn prefers displaced persons from Rakhine. This particular case has the potential to act as a ‘transformative political moment’, as espoused by Rajesh Venugopal and Sameer Yasir¹⁷, as it could alter the way we govern disasters particularly when it comes to complex humanitarian emergencies where natural hazards and displaced populations overlap.

In other relevant works drawn upon for broader country studies, we have identified the importance of the transdisciplinary approach to disaster governance. Such an approach

recognises the capacity strength of sectors and the coordination benefit of interdisciplinary actors combined with affected community engagement and will generate a wide variety of perspectives that have the combined power to address real-world problems and design solutions.¹⁸ With such a chorus of opinions, it is necessary to embrace these perspectives and look beyond traditional toolkits and theories to build complex arguments that answer such real-world problems, often referred to as “analytical eclecticism”.¹⁹ Such an approach moves us beyond the juxtaposed and linear top-down, bottom-up frames towards a more inclusive governance that recognises the collaboration of a wide array of stakeholders operating across different scales.²⁰ In more recent works, this is referred to as ‘net-centric governance’ which transcends the dichotomy between control and collaboration.²¹

This article outlines Bangladesh’s disaster risk context and discusses the country’s exposure to natural hazards and human-induced disasters, as well as the socio-economic and political factors that make it vulnerable to complex humanitarian emergencies. It then examines government policies, structures and mechanisms available that support disaster management and coordination in the context of the Rohingya Exodus, the challenges facing key actors in responding to a human-induced disaster against the backdrop of a looming monsoon season. It therefore raises a central research question, which is ‘To what extent, if any, is disaster governance in Bangladesh transitioning to govern complex humanitarian emergencies?’ This article will focus on the role that coordination, accountability and localization play in the current Rohingya case study and its implications for disaster governance in Bangladesh. Finally, the article identifies some signposts toward improving disaster governance in Bangladesh.

2. Methodology

This article is prepared based on desk research and in-depth semi-structured interviews with humanitarian and disaster relief practitioners in Bangladesh. For desk research, the authors conducted a literature review of key government policy documents, academic writing and institutional reports on disaster management practices in Bangladesh. The aim is to identify Bangladesh’s disaster risks, existing disaster management structures and mechanisms, and the challenges facing them.

Further, 20 semi-structured interviews were conducted during a 10-day fieldtrip between the 20th February and 1st March 2018 in Bangladesh. The interview participants included four government officials, four armed forces officials, one representative of donor agencies, two representatives of the United Nations (UN), five international and two local non-governmental

organisations. Participants are based in Dhaka, Teknaf, Ukhia and Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh and were chosen because of their involvement in emergency disaster response coordination in Bangladesh. Participants signed consent forms, which guaranteed anonymity in line with university regulations. The interviews were conducted on a non-attributable basis. Where applicable, participants' responses are quoted directly in this article. The following guiding questions were posed to the participants during the sessions: -

- (i) What coordination mechanisms were developed in Bangladesh disaster management and coordination for humanitarian purposes and how are they implemented?
- (ii) What kind of documents, doctrines, training and codes of conduct guide disaster management and coordination?
- (iii) What are the challenges faced by different disaster response actors in disaster coordination?
- (iv) What have been/should be the measures taken to address the challenges for better coordination in the future?

Effort was made to engage with as many relevant stakeholders as possible and reflect the perspectives of different disaster management and coordination actors in Bangladesh. The researchers also made a site visit to an unofficial displacement camp in Nayapara. Informal conversations with several Rohingya community leaders and local Bangladeshis helped to inform the writers of the nuances of the 2017 Rohingya Exodus. The lack of formal engagement with aid beneficiaries or local communities hosting the displaced Rohingya population is a limitation to this article.

3. Disaster risk context in Bangladesh

Bangladesh has three main rivers - the Ganges, the Brahmaputra/Jamuna and the Meghna, which converge at the centre to become the spine of the country's network of rivers. Dhaka, Bangladesh's capital city, sits in the middle of the Ganges delta. In the summer, the rivers funnel icy water and silt from the melting snow of the Himalayas through Bangladesh before emptying into the Bay of Bengal. Together with rainfall during the monsoon season, an estimated 1,500 billion cubic meters of water flows through Bangladesh's vast river system each year. Apart from the Chittagong Hill Tracts in southeastern Bangladesh, bordering India and Myanmar, it is a country of flat, low-lying floodplains. Two thirds of its broad deltaic plains stand just five meters above sea level.²² Heavy annual rainfall during the monsoon season

from June to October expose the country to floods from overflowing rivers. Willem Van Schendel notes that “it is not the amount of water that determines the harmful effects of flooding ... [but] the force with which the water pushes through ... and the number of days it stays on land”.²³ In a normal flood year, about 20 per cent of the country is inundated every summer.

However, in a year of extreme floods, up to 60 per cent of Bangladesh may be submerged.²⁴ When this happens, the country sees widespread damage to crops and properties in addition to the loss of lives. As an example, Bangladesh was struck by two consecutive floods in April and August 2017. During the flood, 32 districts in the north and central parts of Bangladesh were submerged, affecting 8 million people and killing at least 140.²⁵ The floods destroyed over 620,000 hectares of crops, causing government rice stocks to plunge and food prices to soar by 19.4 percent.²⁶ As a result of the flood, access to affected areas were restrained by damaged roads and highways. The World Bank reports that 9,000 km of roads and 457 bridges and culverts as well as 100km of rail lines were damaged. Such destruction continues to negatively affect asset value, wage growth, livelihoods, ability to cultivate land, food and water security long after flood water recedes.²⁷ This often tips the most vulnerable households into chronic poverty.

Figure 1: Main Rivers and Flood Affected Area in Bangladesh

Source: Bangladesh Water Development Board, n.d.

In the South where the country's coastline faces the Bay of Bengal, coastal communities live in the path of heavy monsoon showers and tropical cyclones from the Indian Ocean. Cyclones generally occur at the beginning of summer (April-May) and towards the end of the rainy season (October-November).²⁸ Between 1980 and 2000, the country was hit by an average of 3.43 tropical cyclones a year.²⁹ During this period, Bangladesh accounted for more than 60 per cent of registered deaths from tropical cyclone hazards worldwide.³⁰ Storm surge is a major cause of death and injury during a cyclone, when coastal communities are vulnerable to high winds with speeds of up to 150mph and waves as high as 20 feet.³¹ The destruction of Sunderbans, Bangladesh's natural barrier of mangroves is one reason for the exaggerated impacts felt by affected communities. Bangladesh has reduced the number of cyclone-related deaths through improvements to early warning systems, mitigation efforts such as building of embankments and cyclone shelters, development of evacuation plans, and raising awareness at the community level.³² Some of these improvements are being adapted to the Rohingya such as the Cyclone Preparedness Program, which trains volunteers on communication skills and key preparedness messages. By the end of April 2018, 16 men and 19 women had received the training in Nayapara Camp.³³

Figure 2: Cyclone Affected Area in Bangladesh

Source: Bangladesh Space Research and Remote Sensing Organisation, n.d.

Still, storm surges from a cyclone leaves Bangladesh flooded for weeks with a large amount of saltwater. Floods and cyclones are Bangladesh's biggest natural disaster risks but the

country also sits in one of the most seismically active regions in the world and has had a history of severe earthquakes.³⁴ Although the country has not seen a major earthquake in recent times, geophysicists predict a massive earthquake with a magnitude of between 8.2 and 9 as a result of the Indian plate colliding with the Eurasian plate. The Burma or Sunda plate is also shifting westwards into Bangladesh predicting a forthcoming large earthquake although they are unable to point to a timeline.³⁵ Bangladesh is also susceptible to salinity intrusion, tornadoes, riverbank erosion, tsunamis, droughts, arsenic contamination, landslides and water logging.³⁶ These hazards affect different parts of the country and segments of the population to varying degrees but are all recurrent threats and have serious social and economic consequences. Of particular concern with the displaced and host communities in Cox's Bazar is the prospect of floods³⁷ and landslides³⁸, which will affect an estimated minimum of 150,000 people in the monsoon period.³⁹

Bangladesh has a population of 165 million that equates to 2,889.5 persons per square mile on 56,900 square miles, of which 30 percent is coastal land.⁴⁰ Large numbers of this population are exposed to hazard-induced shocks and stress by virtue of living on fertile but hazard-prone lands; their livelihoods depend on the climate-sensitive subsistence economy.⁴¹ The Rohingya in Bangladesh are found in a highly dense population around Cox's Bazar, a disaster-prone region. In August 2017, Bangladesh experienced the beginning of what would be the largest single influx of Rohingya into the Teknaf and Ukhia sub-districts. Over 650,000 Rohingya crossed the Naf River, which led to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) declaring a 'Level 3 Emergency'.⁴² Few studies have comprehensively evaluated Bangladesh's disaster management practices and there is a particular gap on how effective its plans and policies are, how the different actors interact, or the success of their collective coordination. Empirical studies are generally limited by evaluations on specific disaster management institutions or policies/plans, type of disaster or disaster risk, geographical location and the type of disaster management. However, the literature does illustrate several challenges to disaster management in the country, which are outlined in the next section. In the makeshift settlements established prior to August 2017, 99 per cent were constructed using bamboo and plastic sheeting, highly vulnerable to the impact of natural disasters including floods and cyclones. The vast majority of new arrivals staying in spontaneous sites had no shelter and stayed in the open air.⁴³ Prior to the relocation of Rohingya around Cox's Bazar into the Kutupalong-Balukhali mega camp, many displaced persons from Rakhine took shelter in the Chittagong Hills Tracts. As a diverse region home to Bangladesh's ethnic minorities, the mass movement of the Rohingya into the Chittagong Hills Tract caused concern over ethnic balance and political stability. Bandarban government administrator Dilip Kumar Banik said in a news interview, "the government has now decided to shift all 15,000 newly

arrived Rohingya to the main camp... to ensure peace in the hill district".⁴⁴ "Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina forbid Rohingyas from living in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and ordered to take all refugees to Cox's Bazar," the state minister for Chittagong Hill Tracts Bir Bahadur Ushwe Sing has said.⁴⁵

In terms of the economy, agriculture (mostly rice monoculture) is the key sector in Bangladesh, accounting for nearly 20 percent of GDP and 65 percent of the labour force. Agriculture is a key driver for poverty reduction in Bangladesh.⁴⁶ Although non-farm incomes have increased in the last decade, about 87 percent of rural households in Bangladesh still draw some income from agriculture.⁴⁷ State-driven policy reforms and strategic investments on infrastructure such as irrigation expansion and road connectivity has led to the growth of agriculture productivity. As the country's major food crops such as wheat, rice and maize are seasonal; stress becomes acute in the event of a crop failure or a poor harvest. Floods or droughts magnify the adverse seasonal consequences with irreversible effects on people's livelihoods.⁴⁸ These risks to farm activities inevitably affect the food and economic security of a large portion of the population in Bangladesh. Coupled with the threat of natural disasters, the local population offered refuge to the large-scale influx of Rohingya from Myanmar into Bangladesh. However, the impact of such a large-scale population movement made food and economic insecurity more acute for both the local and displaced populations. After the mass movement of people into the area, the displaced persons undercut local wage rates, as they would work for cheaper. As a result, ISCG devised an incentive payment scheme, which outlines workers engagement in paid projects and a flat rate of 250 BDT for a five-hour working day whether the worker is from the host or displaced community.⁴⁹ In Leda camp, for example, they selected 50-50 host-displaced workers, whereas in Mukti they were taking 70-30 displaced-host community workers in early 2018.⁵⁰

With the human insecurities faced in Bangladesh, it is also important to recognise the political dynamics that have shaped these. Its history of civilian rule has been regularly punctuated by military interventions into civilian politics and mutinies.⁵¹ Bangladesh has had a sustained period of democratic civilian rule since 2009 until the present. Civilian control over the Armed Forces of Bangladesh is vested mainly with the Prime Minister, who also holds the post of Minister of Defence. The Armed Forces Division (AFD), an extension of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) is the principal organ that coordinates all operations and administrative matters relating to the military.⁵² The AFD is said to have strict control over promotion, appointment and firing in high-ranking military positions and advises the government on defence and military affairs.⁵³

However, the military remains an entrenched stakeholder in the political system and public institutions. Both the Awami League and their rival Bangladesh Nationalist Party see military support as essential to breaking political deadlocks in their favour, particularly during the pre-election period when a caretaker government is in power. As a result, the armed forces are drawn into party politics and civilian elections. Political parties try to recruit retired army officers to campaign and to build informal networks with soldiers.⁵⁴ Yet retired military officers only make up a small fraction in the National Assembly.⁵⁵ Further, national intelligence agencies - the National Security Intelligence and the Directorate General of Forces - and paramilitary forces - the Bangladesh Border Rifles and Ansar Bahini - are headed by retired generals and are mostly staffed by military officers.⁵⁶ In some administrative districts such as the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the military has direct control - holding decision-making roles, including general administration, law enforcement and development and conducting military operations.⁵⁷ The Chittagong Hill Tracts is the homeland of indigenous non-Muslim peoples. The majority Muslim Rohingya from Rakhine initially settled in the Chittagong Hill Tracts causing concern among the indigenous groups that their presence would undermine the area's ethnic balance. Subsequently the Bangladesh government consolidated the displaced population into the neighbouring district at Kutupalong camp, which is now the world's largest and most densely populated camp.⁵⁸

In addition, the military has substantial corporate and economic interests in the country. Through its welfare trust Sena Kalyan Sangstha and various business subsidiaries, the Bangladesh Armed Forces' business empire spans across the construction, real estate, flour milling, textile manufacturing, food and beverage, hospitality and banking sectors.⁵⁹ Several writers argue that substantial corporate and financial interests ensure the military takes abiding interests in civilian politics and would be more disposed to intervene if it perceives risks to its interests.⁶⁰ Others like Rashed Uz Zaman and Niloy Ranjan Biswas argue, however, that economic interests such as the military's involvement in UN peacekeeping mission depended on good relations with civilian governments, thus increasing civilian leverage over the armed forces.⁶¹ While these economic interests provide an important source of income for the military, it also allowed the armed forces to help the district administration to distribute relief goods, build roads, and construct 10,000 latrines for the displaced population in the absence of local private sector capacity.⁶² An INGO participant working in the WASH sector said the military is more likely to "maintain the quality better than other agencies" and "can also finish [the works] fast". In terms of capacity-building, the armed forces have played an important role, and transferring their knowledge to other sectors is important.

4. Disaster Management and Coordination in Bangladesh

Disaster management in Bangladesh is characterised by its complex institutional structures, as well as the number of government stakeholders for policymaking and coordination for disaster management operations. The disaster management regulatory framework is provided by the Disaster Management Act 2012 (DMA) and the Standing Orders on Disaster (SOD).⁶³

The DMA defines a disaster as:

‘any such incidents mentioned below created by nature or human or created due to climate change and its massiveness and devastation cause such damage...or create such level of hassle to that community whose own resources, capability and efficiency is not sufficient to deal with and relief and any kind of assistance is needed to deal with that situation.’

Of particular relevance for the Rohingya influx is its reference in the DMA under (f) that ‘any unnatural incident or a misfortune causing massive life loss and damage.’ Unnatural incidents or deaths include events such as executions, murder, acts of terrorism, and war, all of which have been identified in different forums as the catalysts for the Rohingya exodus. The DMA determines what disaster management activities are undertaken, and which agency is responsible for them.⁶⁴ The SOD outlines disaster management arrangements and specifically defines the roles and responsibilities of government ministries, departments, the armed forces, national and subnational disaster management committees as well as the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement before, during and after a disaster occurs. The National Plan for Disaster Management, a policy document prepared by the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR) offers strategic direction and implementation guidelines to the DMA and SOD. Revised every five years, the plan aligns the national framework with international policy drivers for disaster management. Other hazard specific disaster management plans, include the Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan, Flood Action Plan and the Cyclone Preparedness Program, which complement the National Plan for Disaster Management.⁶⁵ Collectively, these plans provide implementation guidelines to existing disaster management laws and policies.

The MoDMR functions as the government’s focal point for operationalising disaster management plans in Bangladesh. At the national and subnational levels, public office holders are organised in committees to facilitate the practical implementation of disaster management

policies. There are 12 disaster management committees (DMC) at the national level; each has specific responsibilities ranging from reviewing disaster management systems and policies, evaluating disaster preparedness, response and recovery measures, facilitating coordination and approving plans for risk reduction and emergency response. At the local level, every administrative district has a DMC with clear responsibilities, organised based on each phase of the disaster cycle – risk reduction, emergency preparedness, emergency response and recovery.

In September 2013, the Bangladeshi government announced their National Strategy on Undocumented Myanmar Nationals and Refugees. The government initiated a response to the influx across national ministries and agencies, and allocated 2,000 acres of forestry land for the establishment of a new camp to the west of Kutupalong. The MoDMR is the coordinating ministry to consolidate the population in the new camp. The District Authority established a mechanism for donations to direct private cash donations where it is needed most. The district health complex provides urgent medical attention, while the department of Public Health Engineering deployed resources to provide water in spontaneous settlements. Local communities have provided the first wave response offering food and basic items to the new arrivals. The Department of Immigration and Passports has implemented biometric registration of the refugees with the support of UNHCR. The National Task Force (NTF), chaired by the Foreign Secretary with 22 ministries and agencies monitor the national strategy and oversee the influx response. At the district level, a District Task Force (DTF) monitors and coordinates on the ground, led by the Deputy Commissioner and includes ministries like MoHA, MDMR, MoCHTA, MoC and different line agencies like the NGO Bureau, BBS, ERD, LGD and the security and intelligence agencies.⁶⁶

However, some researchers note discrepancies between official disaster management policies and the realities on the ground.⁶⁷ Policymaking on disaster management remains a technocratic, top-down process where local level participation is limited,⁶⁸ which was confirmed during fieldwork. These observations are iterated in the disaster risk governance literature more broadly, which recognises that most national risk reduction policies still rely on command-and-control and top-down frameworks, which pit scientific knowledge and national government intervention against local action with the former in a substantively stronger position.⁶⁹ Rabiul Islam and Greg Walkerden argue that policy documents and government reports emphasise linking networks at the top levels of government, stressing relationships between government institutions, foreign states, regional forums, international bodies and foreign donors, while neglecting grassroots networks and their contribution to disaster recovery.⁷⁰ In assessing the country's disaster policy, Rabiul Islam and Greg Walkerden find

there was virtually no direct involvement of communities affected by climate change.⁷¹ Saidul Huq finds that major hindrances to community participation in disaster management include the prevailing notion that relief is the responsibility of state institutions, a lack of resources for community-based programmes, and an absence of coordination forums with local communities.⁷² Many local civil society organisations working with the Rohingya, however, do not want to go under the umbrella of the ISCG. These organisations feel that they have already been working with the Rohingya community, are coordinated by the government, and do not understand why they should be coordinated by ISCG as well.⁷³ Emdad Haque and Salim Uddin observe that partnerships between the Government of Bangladesh and other stakeholders in disaster management “remains largely on paper”.⁷⁴ While high-level decision-makers are aware of the need to institute reform, community and local government engagement by the central government remains nascent. This contrasts with the RRRC, which receives the majority of its funding from the international community through UN agencies. While the top executives are from the government, the lower ranking and majority of staff are from the project office, which receives funding from UNHCR.⁷⁵

The literature also indicates that implementation of national disaster management policies at the local level is uneven despite detailed directives by the SOD. Mohammad Harun assesses implementation of the SOD directive at the Union level in two disaster-prone districts - the Kakua and Monsurnagar Unions – and concludes that there is a mismatch of DMC capacity and the scope of work assigned.⁷⁶ He finds that the Union DMC Chairmen have very poor knowledge on the SOD, the phases of disaster management and are unaware of their responsibilities to hold frequent meetings for disaster management planning. The Union DMCs that were studied also do not have their own Contingency Plan (required by the SOD) and continue to view their role as limited to facilitating post-disaster response and rehabilitation.⁷⁷ Tofayel Ahmed, Haruna Moroto, Saiko Sakamoto and Akiko Matsuyama come to a similar conclusion on local DMCs capabilities, noting that local-level DMC members do not receive formal training on disaster management nor have ready access to disaster management policies and guidelines.⁷⁸ The study adds that it is unclear how or if national agencies like the IDMCC or the MoDMR monitor local-level DMCs. Nor is it clear if subnational DMCs receive the necessary budget allocation necessary for executing disaster management plans.⁷⁹ Whilst there is clear awareness of high-level decision-makers over the need to devolve power and activity to local levels, it has not gone hand-in-hand with an investment in capacity. This has led to more indecision and ineffective policy implementation within the national disaster management system.

Since 25 August 2017, violence targeted at the Rohingya population has led to the exodus of 671,000 people from Myanmar to Bangladesh. Local communities were still recovering from the impact of Cyclone Mora that hit the district in May 2017 when the first arrivals of Rohingya appeared at the end of August 2017. The Cox's Bazar district is an area exposed to pre-monsoon cyclones from April to May and monsoon rains from October to November annually. Many of the arrivals are women and unaccompanied children who were physically injured and deeply traumatised, having lost their homes and family members. At least 58 percent of Rohingya are children. Prior to this influx, Bangladesh was already hosting 303,070 Rohingya or what the Government of Bangladesh refers to as "forcibly displaced Myanmar Nationals" in unofficial settlements in the upazilas of Teknaf and Ukhia in Cox's Bazar. This is in addition to the 34,000 Rohingya officially recognised as refugees living in two camps managed by UNHCR in Nayapara and Kutupalong. The Rohingya population occupies a sprawling complex of shelters built with bamboo and plastic sheets on 4,800 acres of reserve forestland in Cox's Bazar allocated by the Government of Bangladesh. Many living within the camps are still in need of urgent life-saving assistance.

At the time of writing, the humanitarian community is still operating in the emergency response phase. Arrivals from Myanmar have slowed but have not stopped. The governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar have signed a Memorandum of Understanding on 23 November 2017 for the "safe, voluntary and dignified" repatriation of displaced Rohingya population to Myanmar. The deal was reached without the involvement of the international community and its operationalisation is unclear. However, references to the United Nations and its agencies were included along with a commitment to international law. In February 2017, Bangladesh handed a list of 8,032 "eligible returnees" to the Burmese government for repatriation but it was reported that Myanmar was willing to accept less than 400 Rohingya on the list.⁸⁰

The Cox's Bazar district is vulnerable to natural hazards like the pre-monsoon cyclone season (April-June) and monsoon rains (October-November). The Rohingya population is expected to be particularly exposed to heavy wind, flooding and landslides. The Government of Bangladesh and the humanitarian community are cooperating to implement disaster preparedness activities for the local and displaced populations. In March 2017, the humanitarian community led by the ISCG and the Strategic Executive Group worked with the Government to draw up a Joint Response Plan (JRP) that requests US\$951 million to support humanitarian assistance including food, water, sanitation, shelter and medical care to 1.3 million Rohingya and local host communities for the period of March-December 2018.⁸¹

One of the greatest challenges to disaster management in Bangladesh is the sheer number of agencies and mandates, which increases the likelihood of overlap and ineffectiveness. The

table below outlines the fourteen bodies that govern or advise key decision-makers on natural disaster management in Bangladesh. Much of the capacity remains at the top echelons of society in the bureaucracy and with politicians, while local government and communities are left behind. This broadly reflects observations elsewhere that local knowledge does not receive due consideration in disaster governance and oftentimes goes completely unheard, whereas top-down command-and-control structures remain dominant. This is even considering the repeated problems with command-and-control structures being illustrated in the literature over the longer-term.⁸² This compares to the Office of the Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRRC) also reflected below, which was established to govern the Rohingya refugees who fled into Bangladesh in the early 1990s. The Commission office is located within the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR) but 'out-posted' to Cox's Bazar. Initially, the RRRC was tasked with overseeing the 34,000 registered refugees only. Since the most recent influx from 25 August 2017 onwards, the RRRC now oversees the entire refugee population. The precursor ministry to MoDMR⁸³ was the largest recipient of financial support from the UNHCR, with allocations reaching 20 percent of the UNHCR's operational budget in 2011. The UNHCR paid mission allowances to MFDM personnel seconded to the RRRC office in Cox's Bazar as well as the salaries of some 130 RRRC personnel hired locally in the Cox's Bazar area. As a result of international financial support, the capacity at a more localised level with the RRRC is greater than at the local level within the disaster management structure overseeing natural hazards. However, the greatest challenge is how these two structures work together when natural disaster affects the Cox's Bazar area, particularly since the most recent exodus of Rohingya into Bangladesh.

The 2017 Rohingya Exodus fits uneasily with conventional government disaster management modalities. The DMA defines 'disaster' broadly but the SOD is understood by all stakeholders to be irrelevant for responding to Rohingya influxes. As such, the Government's disaster management structures have been successful at managing natural disasters like floods and cyclones but untested in conflict-induced or largescale disasters like a high magnitude earthquake or large population movements until last August.

The PMO directive issued in mid-September framed the emergency response to the Rohingya influxes in 2017. It created an ad hoc and centralised disaster management coordination structure for responding to displaced Rohingya that runs parallel to what responds to natural disasters like floods and cyclones. With that, the RRRC took over relief coordination and authorises site-management and planning for refugee settlements. Correspondingly, the DC and HCTT will serve the local Bangladeshi population. It is unclear how the two coordination

structures will interact with each other in the event of a natural disaster hitting both populations in Cox's Bazar. For instance, questions on how duties such as conducting needs assessment and drafting emergency response plans will be split during an emergency or how evacuations could be done when the mobility of Rohingya populations are restricted still need to be answered for disaster preparedness to be meaningful. The Bangladesh authorities in conjunction with the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society and American Red Cross have been training local residents in cyclone preparedness programmes (CPP) since 1972. Most recently, with the support of IOM and other partners, those skills are being shared with the refugees tasked with saving others in emergency events.⁸⁴

National Level Disaster Management Institutions

Ministerial Level	National Disaster Management Council (NDMC)	Headed by the Prime Minister to formulate and review disaster management policies and issue directives to all concerned.		
	Inter-Ministerial Disaster Management Coordination Committee (IDMCC)	Headed by the Minister for Disaster Management and Relief to implement disaster management policies and the decisions of the NDMC/government.		
	National Disaster Management Advisory Committee (NDMAC)	Headed by an experienced person nominated by the Prime Minister.		
	National Task Force (NTF)	Chaired by the Foreign Secretary with 22 ministries and agencies to monitor the national strategy and oversee the Rohingya influx response.		
	Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MDMR)	Government ministry to reduce the risk of people, especially the poor and the disadvantaged, from the effects of natural, environment and human induced hazards to a manageable and acceptable humanitarian level and to have in place an efficient emergency response management system.		
Ministry HQ Level	Natural Disaster		Human-induced Disaster	
	Disaster Management Bureau (DMB)	To improve the capacities of disaster management stakeholders and coordinate disaster management policy issues in favour of MoDMR.	Office of the Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRRC)	Provide oversight of entire refugee population.
	Department of Disaster Management (DDM)	Implement disaster management programmes in the field; particularly mitigation, preparedness (evacuation		

		routes, disaster shelters, etc.), and relief and rehabilitation activities.		
	Committee for Speedy Dissemination of Disaster-Related Warning/Signals (CSDWS)	Headed by the Director General of DMB to examine, ensure, and find ways and means for rapid dissemination of warnings to the people.		
	Focal Point Operation Coordination Group of Disaster Management (FPOCG)	Headed by the Director General of DMB to review and coordinate the activities of various departments or agencies involved in disaster management and to review the contingency plans prepared by relevant departments.		
	NGO Coordination Committee (NGOCC)	Headed by the Director General of DMB to review and coordinate the activities of NGOs working in the field of disaster management.		
	Disaster Management Training and Public Awareness Building Task Force (DMTAF)	Headed by the Director General of the Disaster Management Bureau to coordinate the disaster-related training and public awareness activities of the government, NGOs, and other organisations.		
	Local Level Disaster Management Institutions			
Local Government Level	District Disaster Management Committee (DDMC)	Headed by the Deputy Commissioner (DC) to coordinate and review disaster management activities at the district level.	District Task Force (DTF)	Led by the District Commissioner to monitor and coordinate the national strategy and influx response on the ground.
	City Corporation Disaster Management Committee (CCDMC)	Headed by the Mayor of the city corporation to coordinate, review, and implement disaster management activities within its area of jurisdiction.		
	Pourashava Disaster Management Committee (PDMC)	Headed by the Mayor of the city corporation to coordinate, review, and implement disaster management activities within its area of jurisdiction.		
	Upazila Disaster Management Committee (UzDMC)	Headed by an 'Upazilla' Nirbahi Officer' (UNO) to coordinate and review disaster management activities at the "upazilla" level.		
	Union Disaster Management	Headed by the Chairman of the Union Parishad to coordinate, review, and		

Committee (UDMC)	implement disaster management activities in its particular union.		
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Source: Authors 2018

4.1 The role of the civilian government

Although the local government in Cox's Bazar district are accustomed to responding to natural disasters and population movements, the scale of the 2017 Rohingya Exodus caught local authorities and the humanitarian community off-guard. No one was able to predict the influx was going to be so significant but the community is used to responding to it every two years. "In 2016, there were 74,000 [Rohingya] ... The first week was unbelievable, 100,000 people. We were still coordinating [the response] for Cyclone Mora that has not finished ... It has been chronic emergencies since October 2016."⁸⁵

Participants described the operating environment during the first days of the influx as "chaos", "simply crazy", "dirty and nasty" and "disorganised". Rohingya were stranded along roadsides without assistance, disrupting traffic and creating safety risks. Spontaneous settlements formed and grew quickly in Teknaf and Ukhia as new arrivals clear forest land and hills to build shelters. Host communities were the first responders - providing food and shelter to the new arrivals. The DC in Cox's Bazar offered cooked meals and blankets and ushered the Rohingya towards existing unofficial settlements in Kutupalong by broadcasting announcements through loud speakers.⁸⁶ Two local government officials interviewed said that they were overwhelmed with providing for the population in need, managing the volume of incoming relief materials through ad-hoc distribution of relief materials, and cash by non-traditional actors along main roads.⁸⁷ At this stage, a coherent coordinated response was absent. One government official said: -

"Private donor relief came and it was tough for the civilian administration to distribute the huge relief goods donated by private organisations ... Initially, we did not bother with coordination. As many actors came, we welcomed them and their help ... We did not have any government framework."⁸⁸

In mid-September, the PMO issued a directive for a coordinated approach for responding to the 2017 Rohingya Exodus. It directed, inter alia, that (i) MODMR lead the coordination for the emergency response with other stakeholders such as the AFD, the RRRC, UNHCR and the UN Migration Agency;⁸⁹ (ii) the deployment of armed forces to Cox's Bazar to manage the distribution of relief items; (iii) all government ministries, departments and organisations were

required to appoint a focal point officer for coordination; (iv) the building of 14 temporary warehouses by the WFP; (v) the AFD to manage and transport incoming relief materials at airports to Cox's Bazar; (vi) for the DC to receive and manage the distribution of relief items; (vii) and line ministries to coordinate with other stakeholders for the provision and construction services like healthcare and sanitation facilities.

In the initial phase of the response, the RRRC led the Site Planning Taskforce for the development of the Kutupalong Expansion site on 2,000 acres of undeveloped forest land allocated by the Government of Bangladesh with implementing agencies like the IOM and UNHCR. The site was subsequently expanded to become the Kutupalong-Balukhali mega camp. Refugee settlements were organised in blocks/zones, with military focal points appointed for each block.⁹⁰ Later, RRRC shifted the administration boundaries from zones to camps and appointed a Camp in Charge (CiC) to lead the administration and coordination of each camp and are supported by site managers from humanitarian organisations.⁹¹ In October 2017, 20 CiCs were deployed on short term rotations. The number is expected to rise to 30 CiCs covering 30 locations, out of which 23 are located within the mega camp.⁹² Other sites with more dispersed settings will be looked after by sectoral humanitarian agencies.

The civilian government is also directly involved with coordinating sector-based service delivery to the refugee population within refugee settlements. On the premise of ensuring effective aid delivery and identifying protection needs, the RRRC and UNHCR initiated a family counting exercise to determine refugee numbers, needs and vulnerabilities. Those who are registered are issued a card and an identifier number, although a government official interviewed said that registration is not a prerequisite to receiving aid.⁹³ Inter-sector meetings are held weekly and are attended by sector coordinators/leads to ensure coordination not only within but also between sectors and government representatives. Stakeholders described RRRC's work as creating an "enabling environment for life-saving interventions".⁹⁴ Its role as a "bridge between the government and the [other] actors"⁹⁵ was cited as useful for obtaining government approvals for and overseeing implementation of technical interventions.

One INGO representative said:

"With RRRC, we are getting very great support from the beginning when we explain the issues [we face] ... For example, there was a water emergency in Teknaf in the dry season [that is] ongoing. We discussed [this] with RRRC and RRRC helped us to expand the intervention to provide safe water. When we came up with the unified sanitation technology design ... [we received] approval of DPHE with the help of RRRC."⁹⁶

A government official said:

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1123
1124 “The NGO Affairs Bureau normally issues the FD7 or FD6. They issue this
1125 letter, approve the FD7 and FD6 and that letter goes to [the] DC for supervision
1126 of works of that particular NGO. That is common all over Bangladesh. But, here
1127 it is different. In the camp area, the district commissioner does not have any
1128 network. The network is under RRRC ... DC sends all the FD7 to [the RRRC]
1129 office to take necessary action.”⁹⁷
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1134 However, some noted that despite RRRC’s “flexibility”, there are limitations to its capacity as
1135 a district-level administrator. One participant from the donor community said that approvals for
1136 relief programs are “held up at the central level”.⁹⁸ Most of the non-state actors interviewed
1137 said that there are delays in obtaining FD7 approvals, which does not fall under the jurisdiction
1138 of the RRRC or MoDMR leading to a delay in program implementation.
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1142 1143 **4.2 The role of the Bangladesh Armed Forces** 1144

1145 Within the DMA and the SOD, the military occupies a space equal to that of its civilian
1146 counterparts. The Chiefs of Staff of the Army, Navy and Air Force sit at the apex as policy
1147 makers on the NDMC, reviewing national systems and giving strategic advice on disaster
1148 management. At the inter-ministerial IDMCC, the Principal Staff Officer from AFD oversees
1149 the implementation of disaster risk reduction and emergency response management with its
1150 civilian colleagues.⁹⁹ The AFD is responsible for coordinating the employment of the armed
1151 forces in disaster management and overall relief operations.
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1156 According to the SOD, the military shoulders a significant portion of critical tasks as primary
1157 responders during the disaster response stage - emergency evacuation, search and rescue,
1158 removal of dead bodies and debris, provide medical services, temporary shelter, damage, loss
1159 and needs assessments, transport, distribution of relief goods and logistics.¹⁰⁰ The military has
1160 a presence throughout the country and are able to respond quicker and on a larger scale than
1161 civilian actors can. The military is officially involved in disaster response, relief and
1162 rehabilitation in “aid to the civil power” at the request of the government. In practice, however,
1163 the armed forces may take a lead role. In the Disaster Response Exercise and Exchange
1164 (DREE), an annual simulation exercise for responding to an earthquake, the AFD leads civil-
1165 military and military-military coordination. All participants said the decision to deploy the armed
1166 forces in response to the most recent Rohingya influx was critical to bringing “the situation
1167 under control”. At the time of the interviews, there were 17,000 military personnel stationed in
1168 Cox’s Bazar.
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An AFD representative is stationed at the coordination centre in Ukhia, directing incoming aid that comes through the district administration to different camps. The government established distribution points to curb ad hoc activities by spontaneous local volunteer groups. Participants felt that the military brought order and discipline to actors. On camp sites where there are no CiCs¹⁰¹ appointed, the Bangladeshi Army is responsible for daily administration - assisting with biometric registration of Rohingya refugees, managing disputes between the Rohingya and local populations, attending coordination meetings with other stakeholders and directing new arrivals to RRRC for biometric registration. INGO participants said that the military were helpful in site selection for technical interventions such as the construction of a sludge treatment plant and health posts when finding adequate space is difficult in congested camps.

Further, Bangladesh is the second largest contributor to UN peacekeeping personnel globally.¹⁰² Their involvement with international peacekeeping operations hints at the Bangladesh military's capabilities in responding to conflict-induced emergencies in addition to those caused by natural hazards.¹⁰³ Rashed Uz Zaman and Niloy Ranjan Biswas find that interaction with other peacekeepers enhances operational competency, normalises values such as consent, impartiality, non-use of force except in self-defence, and the concept of civilian control over the military, among Bangladeshi soldiers and officers.¹⁰⁴ Some studies raise questions about the quality of the military participating in disaster management and emergency response. Kabilan Krishnasamy notes, for instance, that Bangladeshi soldiers have been removed from peacekeeping missions for lack of discipline.¹⁰⁵

However, the existing literature has generally neglected to examine the role of the Bangladesh armed forces as a disaster manager, coordinator and responder. Critical questions, including the military's relationship with civilian actors, its interaction with and perception of affected communities, the integration and application of humanitarian operations in military decision-making and operational frameworks, effectiveness of civil-military and military-military coordination frameworks to effectively deliver assistance, are unanswered.

4.3 The role of non-state actors

Outside the state apparatus, disaster management work operates through a vast network of international development donors, United Nations agencies, local and international NGOs. Bangladesh is the sixth largest recipient of overseas development assistance in Asia, receiving US\$2.57 billion in 2015.¹⁰⁶ Multilateral organisations and NGOs are the main channel of delivery of humanitarian aid in Bangladesh.¹⁰⁷ Various international and local

humanitarian NGOs organise themselves through various coalitions, consortia and networks. For instance, the National Alliance for Risk Reduction and Response Initiatives (NARRI) Consortium, and the Bangladesh Developing and Strengthening Humanitarian Assistance and Risk Reduction Initiatives (DeSHARI) are two coalitions of international humanitarian NGOs. These consortia coordinate humanitarian interventions through information sharing and standardisation of disaster response packages to affected communities. The government retains oversight of NGO disaster-related activities through the NGO Affairs Bureau. NGOs are required to submit project proposals in a form called FD-6 to the NGO Affairs Bureau, detailing the project rationale, objectives, and source of funding. FD-6 submissions are approved within 45 days. During an emergency, the NGO Affairs Bureau approves NGO proposals (mainly distribution of relief materials) based on a form called FD-7 within 24 hours. The FD-6 and FD-7 approvals are required to release funds and appoint foreign staff or consultants for project implementation.¹⁰⁸

Humanitarian agencies have scaled up their operations in Cox's Bazar since the first arrivals of Rohingya in 2017. Despite the early chaos, all stakeholders interviewed identified ISCG hosted by IOM and UNHCR, as the body responsible for coordinating humanitarian agencies for the response to the Rohingya Exodus. They also recognised that it was a "positive advantage" that the ISCG was in place before the 2017 exodus. Sector agencies leveraged pre-established relationships with counterparts in government to plan for a quick onset disaster long before the central government's approvals for relief programs came through. Despite that, some participants said that it became clear that an IOM-led response lacked the technical expertise for humanitarian coordination offered by United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) and refugee protection offered by UNHCR needed for a Level 3 emergency. This meant that the internationally mandated agency for humanitarian coordination was not utilised and a negotiated structure was in place, and highlighted the importance of the well-established pre-existing relationship IOM has with the government. This underlines the importance of inter-personal relationships in establishing humanitarian access to populations of concern over-and-above official mandates.

The ISCG structure was modified to meet the demands of the 2017 Rohingya Exodus. The UNHCR's mandate was expanded to cover unregistered Rohingya. The ISCG is now led by a Senior Coordinator who reports to the co-chairs of the Strategic Executive Group (SEG) – the IOM Chief of Mission, the UN Resident Coordinator and UNHCR representative. The Senior Coordinator also chairs the Heads of Sub-Office Group, which brings together all the heads of UN agencies and representatives of INGOs, NGOs and the donor community based in Cox's

Bazar. The ISCG Secretariat is supported by the External Relations Unit, Analysis and Planning Unit, Situation Unit and Coordination Unit. The ISCG has 10 sectors, mirroring the national clusters, led by INGOs/UN agencies and government line ministries for service provision. There are eight working groups to support the ISCG, which have a culture of information sharing. Apart from weekly coordination meetings within and between sectors, sector-level plans, meeting minutes, sector progress reports, joint needs assessments and contact details of focal points are accessible through a public online platform. An ISCG situation report collating every sector's needs, response, operational gaps and constraints as well as coordination developments are published bi-weekly. In addition, a '4W' (Who does What, Where, When) is published periodically to map the implementation actors and humanitarian activities in each camp.¹⁰⁹

There are still reservations with the new structure, however. An INGO Humanitarian Advisor with the UN said that even with the new SEG-led ISCG structure, the humanitarian "operation is a little bit compromised" because of the absence of an OCHA-led coordination approach:

"What coordination structure [is there] in Bangladesh and Cox's Bazar? ... OCHA was initially here for six months but now the operation has been shut down, handed over to the IOM. OCHA came here [and was] working under the coordination of IOM because the government wanted that."¹¹⁰

"When they had the transition, everything they compromised ... OCHA approach, coordination is not followed here ... [UNHCR], their expertise is on refugees. Now, we are talking about the host communities [too]. Government is saying that the host communities have been deprived, could be clear tension between host communities and refugees."¹¹¹

Operationally, different humanitarian agencies are expected to coordinate. A representative from the donor community said, "Whether it is the mandated agency or UNHCR or OCHA, at the end of the day, six months on, people accepted this structure and we have the right system". Based on the Joint Response Plan, the response to the 2017 Rohingya Exodus brings together over 130 humanitarian organisations (13 local, 45 national and 69 INGOs). Most of them work in partnerships with UN agencies and respond based on ISCG's sector-based coordination. The domination of UN agencies and a handful of INGOs in the ISCG was noted by several participants. A limited number of Bangladeshi organisations work as co-lead coordinators in ISCG sectors. Meanwhile, INGO and NGOs operating at the national level are exploring better ways of coordinating their response in Cox's Bazar and to complement the ISCG-led efforts. A participant said that the INGO Emergency Subcommittee in Dhaka is

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1360 planning to decentralise INGO coordination to the district level and form a group called “NGO
1361 Platform” to coordinate NGO activities, and feed information into and raise issues to the ISCG
1362 and district administration.¹¹² This would be a significant devolution of duties from ministry
1363 headquarters in Dhaka to building district level capacity within the ministry for NGO affairs. It
1364 would contrast to the ‘out-posting’ of RRRC whereby the whole agency was relocated to Cox’s
1365 Bazar.
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1369 1370 1371 1372 1373 1374 **4.4 Coordination between different disaster management actors** 1375

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1377 Several platforms exist to coordinate between state and non-state actors in disaster
1378 management during normal and emergency times.¹¹³ The NGO Coordination Committee on
1379 Disaster Management (NGOCC) headed by the Disaster Management Bureau reviews and
1380 coordinates disaster management activities with NGOs. The Secretary of MoDMR chairs the
1381 Local Consultative Group - Disaster and Emergency Response (LCG-DER), which is a
1382 coordination platform that aims to strengthen the collective capacity for humanitarian response
1383 and recovery from disasters. The HCTT was established as an advisory group to the LCG-
1384 DER to give advice on disaster management action. The HCTT is a platform to coordinate
1385 national response to disasters according to nine clusters.¹¹⁴ A national government agency
1386 and international humanitarian agency are co-leads for each cluster.
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1393 A common theme in non-state institutional literature focuses on the quality of humanitarian
1394 coordination in Bangladesh. With the large number of disaster management institutions within
1395 the Government of Bangladesh, there is lack of clarity on how each of them fit into a single
1396 operations system. The SOD demarcates the roles and responsibilities of each institution but
1397 it is silent on the relationship between the different entities.¹¹⁵ Reports indicate that available
1398 forums such as the LCG-DER and the HCTT are utilised for coordination between state,
1399 security forces and non-state actors. However, there is confusion among non-state
1400 stakeholders about what to expect from government agencies such as the DRR and the
1401 Disaster Management Bureau. For instance, the SOD provides that the Disaster Management
1402 Bureau is the agency responsible for coordination and technical tasks. DMB’s status as a
1403 Bureau, however, means that it has no staff beyond those based in the Dhaka headquarters,
1404 and has limited access to resources and authority.¹¹⁶ Further, as all government ministries are
1405 involved with disaster management in some way, line ministries often draw up sectoral
1406 recovery plans themselves without horizontal coordination with colleagues from other
1407 ministries.¹¹⁷
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Coordination and information sharing between non-state actors with the Government of Bangladesh appears to be a constant through existing forums but there are challenges. In a multi-agency environment, there are broad variations in the conduct of disaster management activities on the ground from the collection of data, to needs assessments, the distribution of relief items, and monitoring and evaluation. The significant challenges to inter-NGO coordination are how to harmonize these differences to ensure consistency in coordination at the ground level, and balancing competing pressing and legitimate priorities across different sectors.¹¹⁸ Some commentators note that confronting coordination challenges is made difficult by competition among stakeholders and that in Bangladesh there is a tendency for politicizing humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.¹¹⁹

4.5 The role of beneficiaries

In the 2017 Rohingya Exodus response beneficiaries were engaged through the Majhi system. A Majhi is a Rohingya community leader, typically in charge of 10-12 families within a camp. The Majhi system has been used in Rohingya refugee camps since 1991 but was disbanded in 2007. It was replaced by committees including Camp Management Committees, Block Management Committees and Food Management Committees to ensure more democratic representation and equal gender representation.¹²⁰ Participants reported that Majhis help CiCs, the Bangladeshi Army and humanitarian actors who are site managers to disseminate information, facilitate needs assessments, bring new arrivals to registration centres, relief distribution and conduct night patrols. An army official managing an unofficial settlement said:

“Most of them, all the families listen to the Majhis. All the problems they are facing, they come to the Majhi.”¹²¹

He added that beneficiaries collectively nominate individuals to be Majhis before selecting the required number from the shortlist. He added that nominees who are “a bit educated” are given the priority for the leadership position. Complaints from beneficiaries about abuse of power are investigated and if a Majhi is found to have done so, the Majhi would be removed from his position. It is unclear if this selection process and complaints mechanism are standard practices in all camps. The reintroduction of the Majhi system appears to be in response to the mass movement of people; an imperfect system in a crisis. As the movement of people has slowed, there is a need to shift to camp committees to govern with a more democratic and equal gender representation as was developed in the formal refugee camps.

5. Challenges in the Humanitarian Response to the Rohingya Exodus

Bangladesh had hosted the recent arrivals of Rohingya for six months at the time of the fieldwork. Although stakeholders acknowledge that there are still gaps to the emergency response, many indicated that “things are settled down” and that “more or less, coordination is in place”. As the monsoon season begins, Bangladesh’s disaster preparedness and capacity to cope with a complex and protracted crisis will be tested again. In this section, we provide an analysis on the emergency response thus far based on the main themes identified during the interviews. They are (i) operational constraints; (ii) coordination; (iii) accountability; and (iv) localization.

5.1 Operational constraints

The first operational constraint facing humanitarian actors in Bangladesh is the host government policy on refugees. Although borders are kept open, the Government is clear that the displaced Rohingya population should be repatriated to Myanmar and that Bangladesh is unprepared to host the displaced population over the “mid-term or long-term”. During the 2017 Rohingya Exodus, the Government refrained from declaring an emergency or formally requesting international assistance. It has, however, accepted bilateral assistance. Traditional donors in Bangladesh such as the UK’s Department for International Development (DFID), United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and The Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations¹²² have supported the emergency response mainly through the funding of humanitarian actors. Countries without in-country development agencies like Malaysia, Singapore and Turkey have bilaterally provided relief. There is an awareness among participants that future assistance is not guaranteed without the Government indicating its long-term commitment to host the Rohingya or a formal request for more aid. A representative from the donor community said, “When the Government’s public line is that the Rohingya are not staying here for long, it gives us very little space for sustainable activities.”¹²³

The JRP appeal for US\$951 million, if fully met, will secure funding to serve the displaced and host populations until December 2018. But, with no timeline for the repatriation of Rohingya to Myanmar, many humanitarian agencies are unable to commit resources for sustainable interventions beyond the end of 2018 and unable to formulate an exit strategy. A Dhaka-based INGO representative said:

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1536
1537 “If you don’t have a good, long-term vision or strategy in place, it is difficult to
1538 plan. Each and every day the situation is changing. Sometimes, we hear that
1539 the repatriation will start and then we may have to plan for a quick pull out.
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1541 Then, you see, it may not happen.”¹²⁴
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1544 Meanwhile, the Rohingya population is confined to one mega camp and several smaller sites,
1545 with restrictions to mobility and access to formal job markets and education, hampering
1546 prospects of self-reliance. A second operational constraint highlighted was that the physical
1547 environment and conditions in refugee settlements pose serious limitations on disaster
1548 preparedness against further shocks such as the monsoon season in April. On that, one INGO
1549 representative said, “I am more prepared to die in Yemen than to respond to the monsoon
1550 season” and another called it a looming “massacre”.¹²⁵ All participants singled out the shortage
1551 of suitable land as a key problem and decongestion of settlements as priority for disaster
1552 preparedness. Most of the Rohingya refugees are living on forest land and degraded hill
1553 slopes in structurally weak shelters that do not meet core humanitarian standards. There are
1554 almost no drainage systems in the congested camps and sanitation facilities are regularly built
1555 close to water sources, raising the specter of a public health crisis. Allocation of new land by
1556 the Government would require extensive development before it is habitable and would likely
1557 come at the cost of Bangladesh’s depleting forest resources. The JRP stated that more than
1558 200,000 refugees reside in areas that will certainly flood or collapse with the rainy season.¹²⁶
1559 Structural works being carried out to reinforce hill slopes. The decommissioning of
1560 dysfunctional latrines and the construction of drainage systems are underway. There are also
1561 plans to relocate those most exposed to natural hazards though many have refused to move
1562 because of the concentration of services at present locations. Whatever scarce community
1563 spaces are available, such as learning centres, will likely become common shelters during the
1564 rainy season. A participant summarized the situation bleakly:
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1575 “There are acceptable risks and unacceptable risks. You can only treat the
1576 unacceptable risk. The shelters that are constructed, they are acceptable risks.
1577 You need to accept the risk. When you accept the risk, there are very few things
1578 you can do to change it. You cannot shift the whole community to somewhere
1579 else. If you want to minimize the risk, you have to keep it as it is but that is very
1580 difficult.”¹²⁷
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1584 Participants emphasized a third operational constraint being the scale of impact of a protracted
1585 refugee crisis on the host community and the need to support them. The number of Rohingya
1586 doubles that of local Bangladeshis in Teknaf and Ukhia. This has led to an inflation in the price
1587 of goods and services and the suppression of daily wage rates. The sudden surge in
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population has put public services such as healthcare under strain and increased competition for local resources such as potable water and fuelwood. As a result, this generates conflict-sensitive interventions by humanitarian agencies and included in the JRP. Some humanitarian agencies have introduced work programs as mentioned earlier that require the equal participation of local and Rohingya workers with an equal wage rate. As the crisis prolongs, however, the overlapping of long-term support for the refugee and host population may not fit conventional donor funding modalities, which differentiate between humanitarian and development assistance. This is an important bridge to cross and develop co-deployment of humanitarian and development actors into the field in an attempt to ensure that the needs of the displaced and local communities are met.

5.2 Coordination

Several procedural and operational gaps were uncovered when operationalising the PMO directive. There is a need for greater preparedness for a complex emergency in Bangladesh. At present there is an absence of policies and processes that would facilitate an internationalised emergency response. For instance, one participant reported that there was a lack of clarity on how relief materials coming through the country's airports would be managed. The Bangladesh Armed Forces was tasked to receive and release incoming goods but understood its responsibility as limited to managing goods coming into airports at Chittagong and Cox's Bazar when humanitarian actors expected the military jurisdiction to extend to the airport in Dhaka. A formalised mechanism for constant civil-military coordination appears to be missing on the ground too. Representatives of the military attend coordination and taskforce meetings but participants were quick to point out that it does not have "any regular activities" or "take decisions" at these meetings.¹²⁸ The ISCG sector coordinators communicate with military officials in camps through the ISCG civil-military coordinator. Yet, at the time of writing, the position of civil-military coordinator has been removed from the ISCG focal points list after being vacant for months.

Another gap that was cited as "delaying the process, hindering the operations" was the absence of procedures for processing visa and FD7 applications for international humanitarian staff and organisations intending to respond to a quick onset disaster.¹²⁹ In the response to the 2017 Rohingya Exodus, humanitarian actors said FD7 clearances can take anywhere between 72 hours to two months. In some sectors such as the Education and Protection Sectors, the lack of FD7 approvals continue to hold back available funds, hinder the deployment of new actors and the expansion of programs by existing actors. Visa application procedures are particularly cumbersome for surge capacity staff who need to enter Bangladesh urgently. Many enter with a tourist visa that are valid for four weeks. In June 2018,

the Prime Minister announced that the government is now proceeding cautiously to issue a special category of visa for relief workers. The government remains suspicious of relief workers, as allegedly many foreign nationals enter Bangladesh under the guise of relief workers, which “may lead to child and women trafficking, sexual abuse, terrorism and many other social problems.”¹³⁰ Bangladeshi law enforcement officers have also regularly stopped and sometimes arrested international staff who do not have the correct visa or do not carry identification documents.

Effective coordination between different actors in this emergency response is made more challenging with the high turnover rate of humanitarian staff, military officials and government appointees such as the CiCs. Humanitarian agencies mobilised surge capacity, drawing technical experts and field support teams to facilitate the coordination and planning for the emergency response in the first six months of the crisis. Surge teams operate on short-term rotations of four to six weeks. An ISCG sector coordinator said that said during the interview:

“At the beginning of this crisis, 50 percent of the international staff I used to deal with, a maximum of 10 percent are left. These are the international humanitarian responders ... We are dealing with the seventh health sector coordinator, fifth site-management coordinator ... We can survive with the third round of turnover but after that it is too much ... To coordinate the response, you have to start all over again.”¹³¹

Meanwhile, military officials and CiCs appointed by the Ministry of Public Administration are deployed to the camps on short rotations of two to three months at a time. It is understood that the RRRC has requested the Government for the appointment of CiCs for a longer rotation period of six months but has only been assured that CiCs will serve 3-month stints at a time. This discontinuity is part of the “humanitarian business” and often disrupts trust building between coordinators. It can, however, be addressed with smooth handovers and the localisation of coordination roles.

5.3 Accountability

There is agreement among non-state stakeholders who were interviewed that accountability of service providers to beneficiaries is an issue that requires attention. The operational contradiction between delivering interventions to save lives and to respond to the displaced Rohingya population with respect and dignity were apparent during the crisis. Non-traditional

actors such as spontaneous voluntary groups, the private sector or faith-based groups were singled out for this. Participants said it was commonplace at the beginning of the crisis for non-traditional actors such as these to indiscriminately distribute cash or throw relief items off vehicles at beneficiaries along the roadsides.¹³² By implication, much of this relief goes to people standing on roadsides regardless of benefit and without the obligations to answer for the effectiveness of the interventions.

However, even within a more controlled or coordinated disaster management environment occupied by experienced humanitarian agencies and implementation partners, it was observed that quality of interventions was compromised to reach a greater number of beneficiaries. It was not unusual, for instance, for the ISCG WASH coordination unit to find that hand pumps and latrines were installed incorrectly, in locations which were not accessible to the population in need or did not comply to minimum standards. This was attributed to the overstretched capacity of many actors and the lack of intervention monitoring. Installations that do not meet minimum standards often fall into disrepair, require maintenance or have to be decommissioned, adding on to the responsibilities of other organisations.

A second facet of accountability that was raised during the interviews was that of the coordination mechanisms for humanitarian organisations used in the 2017 Rohingya Exodus. The ISCG Secretariat is the main coordinator of the emergency response but participants pointed out that response coordination and implementation responsibilities are devolved to sector coordinators. The ISCG Secretariat is answerable to the SEG, but is removed from accountability processes that answer to aid beneficiaries. Some are unsettled by the “delusion of accountability” created by how the ISCG is being branded like an organisation of its own. For example, email addresses of the members of ISCG Secretariat do not bear the name of the officer or the organisation he/she is affiliated to. Instead, it has the ISCG domain name. On one hand, this suggests that officers assigned to the ISCG Secretariat do not represent or advance the interests of any single agency but on the other it creates a transparency gap when beneficiaries cannot trace decisions to a specific organisation. The sustainability of the ISCG Secretariat is also in question. Participants highlighted a need to consider a coordination structure that would be able to run without current levels of funding.

5.4 Localisation

The issue of localising disaster management was a key theme in every interview during the study. All participants acknowledge local and national organisations deliver a significant level of assistance in the ongoing humanitarian response. The obvious comparative advantages of Bangladeshi organisations including presence and proximity to a disaster, access to communities in need and knowledge of local disaster contexts, cultures and priorities. However, local NGOs representatives who participated highlighted that their organisations have generally been treated as sub-contractors for INGOs and UN agencies, rather than as equal partners. The involvement of local and national NGOs in strategic decisions such as proposal design and response coordination appear limited.

Local organisations claim they are overlooked for wider coordination roles of the emergency response in UN/INGO-dominant structures like the ISCG. A small pool of UN agencies and INGOs lead both the ISCG sectors and working groups, limiting the space of other organisations to take on leadership positions in an inter-agency coordination structure. For instance, at the time of writing only the Food Security Cluster has a local organisation as a co-lead coordinator and the WASH sector is the only one with a Bangladeshi national as sector coordinator in the ISCG. The binary in the NGO-UN/INGO partnership is that local organisations are used for programme implementation and are rarely given leadership roles within the wider humanitarian system. A representative of a local NGO summed it up thus:

“We implement the programs as per the agreement. They [the INGO] provide the technical assistance and monitoring.”¹³³

Opinions gathered from fieldwork on the localisation agenda in Bangladesh have focussed on assessing the capacity of Bangladeshi organisations, either to manage a humanitarian intervention independently or to manage direct funding from donors. On the one hand, representatives of INGOs, the UN and the donor community are of the view that local capacity for program implementation is evident but there is a general need for improving administrative capabilities and accountability mechanisms. They also note that the number of local and national organisations oriented towards humanitarian work is limited. On the other, local organisations have generally argued that their comparative advantage and experience as front liners in disaster settings make them adequate disaster management actors or coordinators. The perception that INGOs have limited knowledge on local context but are better qualified for disaster response comes at the cost of developing local leadership and sustainable interventions.

There is a case to be made for ramping up efforts to localise disaster management practices in Bangladesh. Initiatives like the National Alliance for Humanitarian Actors, Bangladesh (NAHAB) and the Start Fund in Bangladesh are focussed on creating space for local and

national NGOs to lead humanitarian interventions.¹³⁴ As international aid for the 2017 Rohingya Exodus response tapers or moves out from the emergency response phase, international actors, which have dominated coordination and decision-making structures, have to make strategic decisions about the extent of their own participation in the humanitarian response. Bangladeshi disaster management actors are imperative to a sustainable response. As was seen in the humanitarian response to Super-Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines, the government instituted reforms that saw local governments take the lead in disaster response.¹³⁵ This shift was present two years later when there was a local government-led humanitarian response to Typhoon Hagupit.

There is danger, however, in engaging in a conversation about localisation without evidence-based assessments on how local and international humanitarian actors can complement each other in a particular context. The localisation agenda should not be cast as a one-dimensional referendum on the capacity of Bangladeshi humanitarian organisations. Developing a locally-led disaster management philosophy should not mean local organisations mimicking international ones. Affected communities are best served when the comparative advantages of all actors – local or international – are maximised. For Bangladeshi humanitarian actors, it is important to explore how it can develop and leverage local capacities and harness complementarities with government institutions and other actors. The Red Cross/Red Crescent movement provides a useful example of how local actors can tap onto international support for a locally-led disaster response approach. One donor suggests that this would include local and national organisations differentiating itself by developing a geographical or operational niche, using local knowledge to contribute to policy making, empowering local staff with competitive pay packages, and shedding the overemphasis of securing funding.

6. Conclusion

The analysis presented in this article suggests that the well-established disaster management structure in Bangladesh that was successful in managing natural disasters, specifically for floods and cyclones, has been tested in the ongoing humanitarian response to the Rohingya Exodus. While acknowledging that Bangladeshi state institutions, the Bangladesh Armed Forces and the robust civil society have the capacity to mobilise swiftly for an emergency response, there was little in the way of formally articulated policy for responding to the movement of displaced people, let alone preparedness for coordinating an emergency the

scale of the Rohingya Exodus. State institutions and INGOs had pre-defined mandates that circumscribed their ability to mobilise an immediate emergency response while those with the freedom to mount a response were overwhelmed by the scale of the emergency. It required a directive from Dhaka before disaster management actors (state and non-state) could fully mobilise an emergency response. This article identifies implications arising out of Bangladesh's response to the 2017 Rohingya Exodus.

Firstly, there is scope for deliberation on how Bangladesh's existing disaster management structure may be applicable outside of the familiar context of responding to hazards like floods and cyclones by the government and the humanitarian community. Bangladesh is exposed to a diverse range of hazards; response to each is shaped by different dynamics of the crisis and how it affects the population in need. For example, the humanitarian response is influenced by government policy on unregistered displaced persons, the physical limitations of the two upazilas hosting the displaced population, the damage to the natural environment and the impact on host communities. There is need to analyse how existing disaster management structures and the role of disaster management actors with appropriate skills in Bangladesh can be sufficiently flexible to accommodate a wide range of crisis contexts, and draw on much earlier works on "shared governance".¹³⁶ It is therefore important to improve community-based disaster preparedness by leveraging trained local volunteers and to expand the Cyclone Preparedness Program to support and train Rohingya and more host communities. This will assist in the transition from a single disaster orientation to complex emergencies through the development of disaster governance in Bangladesh away from a linear, juxtaposed top-down versus bottom-up structure towards a system that reflects the multiple actors involved across different levels of governance.

Secondly, the analysis suggests that Bangladesh's disaster management regulatory framework and institutional structure overemphasise the role of government institutions, national and local, for disaster response. The 2017 Rohingya Exodus reveals that existing policies are inadequate for the management of an internationalised response effort. Bangladesh has initially received a great deal of support from the international community, either through the funding of humanitarian organisations or bilateral relief. The effective coordination of a large volume of aid and diverse humanitarian actors hinge on government processes that facilitate the entrance and exit of humanitarian actors and relief goods. As such, there is room for Bangladesh to consider how it can better streamline strategic policy decisions with day-to-day disaster response operations. For example, the decision to deploy the military to a disaster must be supported by an operational civil-military coordination structure and the decision to accept international aid must be supported by processes for receiving and releasing incoming relief materials. It is therefore important to streamline and

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revise the approval processes for incoming relief goods, funds, and personnel drawing on regional experiences like those in the Philippines.

The development of such policies would be supported by active engagement in multilateral forums for disaster management such as the Regional Consultative Group on Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination and disaster management exercises like DREE to bring together military, civilian, NGOs and the Red Crescent/Red Cross communities to explore best practices for disaster governance. It is also important to assess alternative national entry points to Dhaka for foreign relief materials, and to develop a faster and more efficient approval process for INGOs that augment local capacity rather than reduce it at an operational level. There is a solid base of knowledge already in place from Bangladeshi contributions to UN Peacekeeping Operations to other civilian and military responders. It is important that formalised knowledge transfer is institutionalised to build capacity and awareness of best practices that are applicable in complex humanitarian emergencies.

Thirdly, humanitarian action and disaster relief is dynamic, complex, and highly dependent on individual discretion. There must be opportunity for the population in need, humanitarian actors and the government to hold each other to account to ensure that humanitarian action adds value and does no harm to the beneficiaries. Given these dynamics, it is important to build stronger linkages between the RRRC and local governments to mitigate challenges between displaced and host communities. Investing in these linkages would further develop “shared governance” in Bangladesh. Furthermore, it would be worthwhile producing templates for contingency planning drawing on global expertise, particularly for monsoons, landslides and earthquakes. It is also advisable to reassess the Cox’s Bazar development plan, integrate disaster management as part of long-term development, and draw on the availability of human capital, which can be a catalyst for the long-term growth of Teknaf and Ukhia

Lastly, developing a ‘locally-led’ disaster management philosophy is a priority of the humanitarian community in Bangladesh. In actualising the ‘localisation’ agenda, humanitarian actors must know how local, national and international capacities complement each other and how complementarities can be leveraged to achieve more effective humanitarian action. This, in turn, will push disaster governance towards ‘shared’ and ‘net-centric’ governance. At an operational level, it is important to introduce and finance structured knowledge-transfer and capacity-building programs between international and Bangladeshi humanitarian organisations, including seconding an INGO staff member to Bangladeshi partners to support this effort. This extends to greater democratic and equal gender representation in camp governance for the Rohingya themselves. It is therefore important to re-establish camp committees to govern the Rohingya refugee camps to provide this. Bangladesh has strong

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2009 local capacity for managing disasters, evidenced by the active role state institutions take and
2010 the capacity of civil society.
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2013 However, there is room to consider how the thinking on localisation can be reframed as
2014 independent of and not relative to the capacity of international actors. For instance, the
2015 participation of grassroots organisations, community volunteers and non-traditional actors like
2016 the private sector and faith-based organisations should be considered in the conversation on
2017 developing a locally-led humanitarian response. This would be supported by mapping local
2018 community organisations to enhance localization with international organisations and through
2019 the identification of capacity gaps and complementarities among local and national disaster
2020 management organisations with international actors through research. It is also worthwhile to
2021 institute a formal and accessible feedback system for beneficiaries to providers, and a peer-
2022 to-peer feedback mechanism between humanitarian organisations to ensure that the locally
2023 led system is responsive to community needs. This can be supported through the integration
2024 of humanitarian standards and accountability mechanisms into different stages of the funding
2025 cycle, from proposal writing to final reporting. These include periodic monitoring and evaluation
2026 of implementation partners, documented donor visits, and peer monitoring between
2027 humanitarian organisations.
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2036 These efforts can contribute to increasing disaster preparedness among local and national
2037 organisations by building organisational policies and processes that would facilitate disaster
2038 response coordination responsibilities. In particular, it is important for the national government
2039 to work with local government to increase knowledge of the Standing Orders on Disaster and
2040 other disaster management policies and guidelines, and to prepare their own contingency
2041 plans through a formalized training program. Through a concerted strategic effort to continue
2042 the transition of disaster governance towards a 'shared governance' space that governs
2043 complex humanitarian emergencies, Bangladesh is well-placed to become a global leader in
2044 this field.
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