Review of the coordination structure of the refugee response in Bangladesh

Overview:

A team from UNHCR, IOM, UNDP and ICVA undertook a review of the coordination structure of the refugee response in Bangladesh. The review considered numerous reports and evaluations of the response generated over the past year as well as the results of a Lessons Learned Workshop, which took place in Cox’s Bazar on 12 September 2018. A mission by the review team to Bangladesh took place from 20-25 October 2018. The purpose of this report is to present proposals to the Principals of UNDP, IOM, ICVA and UNHCR for adjustments to the coordination structure in Bangladesh. The final report will also be shared with the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, for his information.

During the mission the Review Team met with a wide range of relevant stakeholders in both Dhaka and Cox’s Bazar, including: refugee representatives; representatives of the Government of Bangladesh, including local and national authorities; UN agencies; international, national and local non-governmental organisations; and development partners, among others (full Mission Agenda: Annex 1). The Review Team wishes to express its sincere thanks to all those who contributed their time and knowledge to the review process.

Rationale:

The Review Team recognises the immense achievements made to support the Government-led response to the refugee emergency to date, supported by the humanitarian community’s current coordination arrangements. However, as stated by the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator in his letter to the Foreign Secretary of the Government of Bangladesh on 19 January 2018, the UN coordination arrangements will need to “adapt as the context evolves”. Further, it was agreed by the SEG co-chairs and others that the coordination structure would be reviewed following the conclusion of the monsoon season.

The Review Team found that the context has evolved in a number of important ways, including: i) the emergency response has gradually stabilised following the initial and rapid arrival of more than 720,000 refugees and the conclusion of the monsoon season which ran from June-October 2018; ii) the search for durable solutions for refugees has intensified, combined with renewed steps taken by both governments to create conditions conducive for the voluntary repatriation of refugees; iii) humanitarian funding for the Joint Response Plan for 2019 will likely be significantly less than in 2018 and therefore the costs of coordination structures need to be rationalized; iv) at the same time, significant development funding and activities have been proposed, including through the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank; v) there is a growing need to more comprehensively support all affected communities and to move towards a more localized response; and vi) significant humanitarian support will likely continue to be required over the next 12-month period, in view of continuing exposure to natural disaster and the expected timelines for development initiatives to have an impact on the refugee population and host communities alike.

Objective:
The objective of the review is to make recommendations that aim toward improvements to the coordination approach that will enable different national and international stakeholders in the Bangladesh refugee operation to work together more effectively in pursuit of common goals and to adapt to the evolving context, with a particular focus on the areas of protection, humanitarian assistance, disaster preparedness, resilience, support to both refugees and host communities and the humanitarian-development nexus (Full Terms of Reference: Annex 2).

Based on the input received, the Review Team believes that the following are the main issues that can and should be addressed through adjustments in the coordination structures:

- Greater support is needed to build the capacity of the host government in view of its role for the refugee response at all levels and for more systematic efforts towards localization of the response through civil society engagement.

- There is a need to have a more integrated and cohesive response and to put protection as the foundation of the entire response, rather than as an individual sector.

- Clarification of accountability and leadership of the international response is needed by ensuring greater cohesion and coherence amongst the lead agencies to the response, and having a single agency, UNHCR, lead and coordinate on the refugee protection and solutions aspects of the international response.

- There should be greater uniformity in the application of common standards across the whole operation, removing geographic distinctions and aligning implementation modalities.

- Coordination structures should be simplified with the costs associated with them pared down and be better aligned with government coordination mechanisms.

- Coordination among development partners and between development actors and the humanitarian operation should be clarified. There is a need to optimize engagement toward the medium-term nature of the response, including in disaster risk management and development activities that appropriately address the impact of the crisis on affected host communities.

The report is forward looking and therefore does not purport to be an evaluation or to provide the background of the operation nor of the current coordination system. These have already been well documented in a number of other reviews, documents, and evaluations. It is understood that the recommendations below concerning government participation are subject to government decision making.

**Recommendations for the Way Forward**

Coordinating the Rohingya Refugee Response

Based on consultations with stakeholders, analysis of available reports and evaluations, and on the best knowledge of the Review Team, the Review Team recommends the following changes to the coordination structure:
In Dhaka

The Review Team recommends that the Strategic Executive Group (SEG) co-chair arrangement (UNHCR, IOM, UNRC) be refined so as to have a formalized and distinct role for each of the co-chairs. Each of the co-chairs would then have distinct responsibilities. This is to ensure clearer lines of accountability, and division of responsibilities along thematic lines and areas of focus according to Agencies’ relevant expertise, recognized mandates, capacities and established accountabilities, while remaining in line with host government expectations. Each of the three SEG co-chairs would lead their respective themes and chair meetings of organizations who have a role in that theme. Membership of the groups should be defined in the TORs of the group. It is recognized that there will be some overlap in membership of the three groups. The proposed interface between the groups and their government counterparts will be subject to further consultation between the current SEG co-chairs and the government. The three groups will come together as deemed necessary, under the UN Resident Coordinator’s chairmanship and it is anticipated that the chairs of the three groups (the current three SEG co-chairs) will jointly attend meetings of the National Task Force (when invited) and will be the spokesperson for their respective groups at the NTF meetings.

The three themes and their respective groups would be as follows:

**Refugee Protection and Solutions Group:**
- **Objective:** A UNHCR-led Group dedicated to strategy development and advocacy for the refugee response. The group will have a strong focus on refugee protection and in supporting the search for durable solutions for refugees with a focus on supporting efforts to make conditions in Myanmar conducive for voluntary return. UNHCR will be responsible for developing detailed terms of reference for the Group, in consultation with relevant partners.
- **Composition:** The group will include operational actors involved in the refugee response in Cox’s Bazar, including UN agencies, I/N/LNGOs, and relevant Member States.
- **Government participation:** Government Ministries, would be invited to participate as an essential part of the group, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, for the purposes of enhanced coordination, national capacity building, information sharing, and policy discussions.
- **Government interface:** The group, led by the UNHCR Representative, will interface with the National Task Force, and other Government ministries as necessary/requested.
- **Frequency:** The Group would meet on a monthly basis, or as otherwise deemed necessary.

**Disaster Preparedness and Host Communities Group:**
- **Objective:** An IOM-led Group dedicated to preparedness for the natural risks associated with the response, including future emergency preparedness for the recurrent monsoon and cyclone periods. An important aspect of this will be the extension of the national disaster preparedness and response systems to cover the refugee sites. The IOM Representative will be responsible for developing detailed terms of reference for the Group, in consultation with relevant partners. The question of the interaction between this particular group and the national clusters, who deal with the natural disaster response would need to be well articulated in the TORs.
Composition: The group will include Heads of Agencies, I/N/LNGOs, and other relevant actors.

Government participation: The group will include the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief and counterparts from other relevant ministries. The group would interface with the national natural disaster response mechanisms as well as the NTF.

Frequency: The Group would meet on a monthly basis, or as otherwise necessary.

Development Nexus Group:

Objective: A UN Resident Coordinator-led group that would focus on resilience and development matters, with the objective of formulating a comprehensive mid-term development strategy for Cox’s Bazar District, related to applicable national frameworks. The Group would also provide a dedicated forum to develop common policy and advocacy positions on matters relating to development and support the coordination and exchange of information on development activities. The Group would be linked to the development mechanisms already in place nationally and within the UNCT and take full account of SDGs. The Resident Coordinator will be responsible for developing detailed terms of reference for the Group, in consultation with relevant partners and in coherence with other existing development coordination mechanisms.

Composition: The Group would be made up of UNCT members, other development actors including civil society actors, I/N/LNGOs, Member States’ and other relevant partners.

Government participation: The Ministry of Finance, as the UN Development System’s main counterpart in Bangladesh will be invited to participate (or co-chair) the Group, and would invite other relevant Government Ministries Group as necessary. The Local Consultative Group will provide an important interface for this group. The group would interface with both the NTF, as well as development mechanisms in place nationally.

Frequency: The Group would meet on a monthly basis, or as otherwise deemed necessary.

The lead of each respective Group will represent and be accountable for their respective area of focus and expertise at the NTF and other relevant Government forums.

In Cox’s Bazar:

The Senior Coordinator and Heads of Sub Office Group:

- The primary coordination mechanism and strategic forum in Cox’s Bazar will be the Heads of Sub Office Group, which will be chaired by the Senior Coordinator appointed by and with primary accountability to the UNHCR Representative in Dhaka who will supervise him/her. The Senior Coordinator will continue to work in close coordination with the RC and the IOM Representative in Dhaka in order to facilitate their work on disaster risk management and development and in line with the suggested area of focus at the Dhaka level. The Senior Coordinator will provide overall leadership to the international response at the Cox’s Bazar level, with delegated authority to do so.

- The Office of the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) will co-chair meetings of the HoSO group (or as otherwise agreed with the RRRC).

- Participation to the Heads of Sub Office Group will include operational partners in Cox’s Bazar, including Heads of UN Agencies and NGO representation nominated from relevant NGO fora engaged in the response. Membership of the Group should remain
small enough to allow the forum to be strategic and through which operational decision making can be facilitated, therefore it will need to consist of members who are senior and can make decisions and who effectively represent their stakeholder group and are empowered to do so. Participation and Terms of Reference will be formalized to ensure transparency and accountability.

- The Senior Coordinator, and Heads of Sub Offices as necessary, will be the primary point of interface and advocacy with the Deputy Commissioner as well as the District Task Force and the RRRC. The Senior Coordinator will also be the focal point for leading the localization agenda.
- The group will work along the lines of best practice from similar operations in other parts of the world. The Senior Coordinator will be responsible for leading the development of detailed terms of reference for the Group, which will include clear criteria for membership of the Group.

**Sectors regrouped and become Results Groups:**
The current ten sectors will be regrouped into four focused results-groups each led by an Agency from within the HoSO group, with a co-lead or co-leads. The Results Groups will report to and be accountable to the HoSO Group through the respective lead agencies. The groups will meet on a weekly basis (or as necessary) and will provide guidance, advice, updates, and present issues for decision making at the HoSO Group level. They will also provide inputs to support the reporting elements of the ISCG and to relevant appeals and reports. The transition from the current sector-based approach to one regrouped and based on results and outcomes will require a transition period the roadmap for which should be proposed by the Snr. Coordinator and agreed by the HoSO group. The result should not be an additional layer, but a consolidation of the current ten Sectors. The Senior Coordinator will consult with the relevant stakeholders in Cox’s Bazar, including relevant NGO Fora, in designating the leads and co-leads of each results group which is expected to consist of a mix of UN and NGO leads and co-leads. It is expected that the RRRC would co-chair meetings of these groups with a similar role for the DC in the Resilience Building Results Group.

The results groups will be arranged as follows (final group leadership to be discussed and agreed at the implementation stage):

- **Protection and Solutions Results Group** (including protection, child protection, SGBV, CwC, voluntary returns), led by UNHCR and including the current sub-sector leads, NGO co-leads to be determined;
- **Community Representation and Site Management Results Group** (including shelter, site management), Led by IOM, UNHCR, NGO co-leads to be determined;
- **Basic Needs Results Group** (including health, food and nutrition, WASH, logistics), led by WFP, Unicef, NGO co-leads to be determined;
- **Resilience Building Results Group** (including education, skills development, cash for work), led by UNICEF (co-lead UNDP), NGO co-leads to be determined.

**Inter-Sector Coordination Group:**
As noted above, the Senior Coordinator will be appointed by UNHCR and report and be accountable to the UNHCR Representative in Dhaka. The Senior Coordinator will be supported
by and supervise the ISCG Secretariat. The staffing of the ISCG Secretariat will be streamlined and focused on the type and number of staff that are needed to provide secretariat support (rather than containing specific sectorial expertise). The Senior Coordinator will be responsible for determining the staffing needs of the ISCG, in consultation with the HoSO group. Once the staffing needs are determined, organisations that are part of the Heads of Sub Office Group, as well as other organisations that are engaged in the response, will be asked to formalize staffing contributions to the ISCG. The ISCG will provide the following primary secretariat functions:

- Supporting the work of the Senior Coordinator
- Information management support and production of information products, including financial tracking.
- High-level visit coordination and support
- Civilian/Military liaison.
- Secretariat support to the HoSO group and the results groups (including organizing, minute-taking and reporting)
- External Relations support
- Preparation of appeals documentation

Camp-Level Coordination:
Camp level coordination will be enhanced and become more structured. The camp level coordination is foreseen to gradually move to a more Government led approach under the CIIC structure currently being formalized. As per current practice, a single Agency will be designated as the primary focal point agency in each area or camp to act as the focal point for communication with the respective CIIC. The Heads of Sub Office Group, based on recommendations of the Community Representation and Site Management Results Group (which will include consultation with the Government counterparts) will be responsible for allocating a focal-point agency for each area in the camp and could, for example, be selected on the basis of which agency has the most important operational footprint in that particular area.

The Community Representation and Site Management Results Group will meet on a monthly basis with the RRRC and all CIICs to discuss important matters. The agenda for these meetings will be developed jointly with the RRRC. The Community Representation and Site Management Results Group will be responsible for developing the terms of reference for this Group.

Refugee representatives (as part of the refugee elected representatives and community representation rollout) would interface with the CIICs and protection colleagues as necessary and eventually could be represented in camp coordination meetings.

Localization and Sustainability of the Response:
The Senior Coordinator will take the lead of a process of a sustainable transition to increased local action in the response. This is in line with global commitments to strengthening local and national responders through the Grand Bargain. At Cox’s Bazar level, international and national actors in the response should work with government and local and national NGOs to agree on a roadmap, where each year, local actors, led by local government, have greater responsibility in directly managing and delivering the response. This could include integrated capacity strengthening efforts as appropriate.
Roadmap for implementation:

The Review Team would recommend the following tentative roadmap based on discussions with the Government and other actors in Bangladesh:

- **Nov 2018-January 2019** – Maintain the current coordination structure until after the national election in Bangladesh, based on advice from the Government. Terms of Reference developed for coordination Groups by the accountable Agencies by 15 January 2019.

- **Jan 2019-March 2019** – Government consultations as required on the changes to the coordination structure, and working groups formed of relevant agencies and stakeholders to plan the transition to the suggested structure (as outlined in this report).

- **March 2019 -April 2019** – Implementation of the changes to the coordination structure and formulation of the Groups.

Next Steps:

The report of the review team will be shared with the three co-chairs of the Strategic Executive Group, prior to submission to the Principals. The final report will be submitted to the Principals of UNHCR, IOM, UNDP and ICVA for their consideration and action. Following agreement among these Principals on the way forward, their conclusions will be communicated to the operation in Bangladesh and to the IASC Principals. A strategy for discussion and agreement with the government on the way forward will be led by the SEG co-chairs and will require the support of the international community, UN, NGOs etc.

Submitted by:

Bernard Doyle, **UNHCR Deputy Director of the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific**
Vincent Houver, **IOM Deputy Director for Operations and Emergencies**
Valerie Cliff, **UNDP Deputy Regional Director for Asia & the Pacific**
Jeremy Wellard, **International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) Regional Representative for Asia**

09 January 2019
Schematic View of Proposed Coordination Structure

Government*

Resident Coordinator
(Coordination of development activities and Nexus)

UNHCR
Refugees, Protection and Solutions Group

IOM
Social Cohesion, Disaster Preparedness in Cox Bazar Group

Senior Coordinator

ISCG Sec

Head of Sub Office Group

Results Group 1
Results Group 2
Results Group 3
Results Group 4

*Includes the National Task on the FOMN; the Local Consultative Group mechanism and line ministries
### Annex 1: Tentative Program for Coordination Review Team: 20-25 October

**Rohingya Refugee Response**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Saturday, 20 October (Dhaka)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TBD</td>
<td>TBD</td>
<td>Arrive in Dhaka</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sunday, 21 October (Dhaka and Cox’s Bazar)</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9:00-11:00</td>
<td>TBD</td>
<td>Meeting with SEG Co-Chairs*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13:15-14:20</td>
<td>Novo Air VQ935 to Cox’s Bazar</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15:00-16:15</td>
<td>ISCG Conference Room</td>
<td>Meeting with ISCG Senior Coordinator ai**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16:30-18:30</td>
<td>ISCG Conference Room</td>
<td>Meeting with UN heads of sub-offices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18:45-20:00</td>
<td>TBD</td>
<td>Working dinner with Cox’s Bazar-based donors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Monday, 22 October (Cox’s Bazar)</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8:30-9:30</td>
<td>ISCG Conference Room</td>
<td>Meeting with ISCG Secretariat</td>
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<tr>
<td>9:30-11:30</td>
<td>ISCG Conference Room</td>
<td>Meeting with Sector Coordinators and Working Group leaders</td>
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<tr>
<td>13:00-14:30</td>
<td>RRRC’s office</td>
<td>Meeting with RRRC</td>
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<tr>
<td>15:00-16:00</td>
<td>DC’s office</td>
<td>Meeting with DC and UNOs</td>
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<tr>
<td>16:30-18:00</td>
<td>ISCG Conference Room</td>
<td>Meeting with representative international NGOs</td>
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<tr>
<td>18:30-20:00</td>
<td>ISCG Conference Room</td>
<td>Meeting with representative local and national NGOs and CCNF</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Tuesday, 23 October (Cox’s Bazar and Dhaka)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>8:30-10:00</td>
<td>RRRC’s Office</td>
<td>Consultations with representative CiCs</td>
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<tr>
<td>10:00</td>
<td>Travel to camps (exact locations TBD)</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:30-13:30</td>
<td>TBD</td>
<td>Consultations with refugee representatives</td>
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<tr>
<td>14:30-15:15</td>
<td>ISCG Conference Room</td>
<td>Debrief with ISCG Senior Coordinator ai</td>
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<tr>
<td>16:30-17:35</td>
<td>Novo Air VQ938 to Dhaka</td>
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<tr>
<td>19:00-21:00</td>
<td>TBD</td>
<td>Working dinner with UN Heads of Agencies</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Wednesday, 24 October (Dhaka)</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:00-10:00</td>
<td>Canadian Club (TBC)</td>
<td>Meeting with donor group</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:00-12:30</td>
<td>MOFA</td>
<td>Meeting with FS and DG UN</td>
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<tr>
<td>13:00-14:30</td>
<td>MODMR</td>
<td>Meeting with Secretary and Head of Refugee Cell</td>
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<tr>
<td>15:30-16:30</td>
<td>TBD</td>
<td>Meeting with ADB and WB</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Event</td>
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<tr>
<td>16:30-18:00</td>
<td>TBD (same location)</td>
<td>Debrief with SEG Co-Chairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>18:30-20:00</td>
<td>TBD</td>
<td>Meeting with NGO heads of organization (including SEG NGO representatives)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Thursday, 25 October (Dhaka)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Working breakfast debrief amongst review team members</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>8:00-10:00</td>
<td>TBD</td>
<td>Working breakfast debrief amongst review team members</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*If possible, the meeting with Co-Chairs will be scheduled in the evening on 20 October in order to allow for the Review Team to travel to Cox’s Bazar earlier on 21 October. Alternatively, the meeting with Co-Chairs could possibly be scheduled earlier on 20 October allowing for an earlier flight to Cox’s Bazar.

**Senior Coordinator and Secretariat Manager to be consulted via teleconference as necessary.**
Annex 2: Review of the coordination structure for the refugee response in Bangladesh

Terms of Reference

Background: In January 2018, a humanitarian coordination forum, the Strategic Executive Group (SEG) was established in Dhaka, co-chaired by the Resident Coordinator and the country representatives of UNHCR and IOM. It includes UN Agencies, IFRC, ICRC and NGOs working on the refugee response, as well as representatives of development partners. The SEG provides policy advice and support to partners working in Cox’s Bazar coordinated through the Inter-Sector Coordination Group (ISCG), led by the Senior Coordinator. It was agreed by relevant stakeholders that this current coordination structure would be reviewed following the conclusion of the monsoon season in Cox’s Bazar.

Objective: The objective of the review is to make recommendations that aim toward a coordination approach that will enable the different national and international stakeholders in the Bangladesh refugee operation to work together more effectively in pursuit of common goals in the areas of protection, humanitarian assistance, development, resilience, and support to the host communities.

The recommendations following the review exercise should result in:

- Clarity of accountability for the refugee response;
- Maximum efficiency and effectiveness in the provision of assistance and protection, and in ultimately finding solutions for refugees;
- Optimal engagement toward the medium-term nature of the response, including in risk management and development activities that address the negative impacts of the crisis and appropriately covers both the refugee and host communities.

Relevant consultations will be held with a wide range of actors, including the Government and the NGO members of the SEG who are working on the refugee response. While the government will not the primary focus or interlocutor in this process, the resulting approach should be one that is compatible with the existing government approach and that can eventually facilitate full government leadership and accountability for the refugee response. The final recommendations will be consulted with the SEG Co-Chairs and presented to the principals of UNHCR, IOM and UNDP.

Review Team: The Team to conduct the review and articulate the subsequent recommendations will consist of representatives from the Headquarters of the UNHCR, IOM and UNDP, together with a representative of NGOs in Cox’s Bazar.

Steps in the Review:

End of August: Build consensus on the team and process

September:

3-7: Desk Review

10-14: Lessons Learned workshop on 12 September in Cox’s Bazar

October:

7-14: Team mission to Bangladesh and finalise proposals

22-26: Proposals submitted to principal