



2020-21 BANGLADESH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM PROGRESS REPORT

The *2020-21 Bangladesh Development Program Progress Report* summarises progress for the reporting period 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021 of implementation of the Australia – Bangladesh COVID-19 Response Plan and program highlights.

Our development program to Bangladesh contributes to achieving the following Sustainable Development Goals.



Program Budget	2020-21 Budget Estimate \$m*
Bilateral	30.8
Regional	4.6
Global	18.5
Other Government Departments	1.8
Total ODA	55.7

*Actual expenditure is expected to be available in December 2021/ January 2022.

CONTEXT

Australia bolstered the Bangladesh Government’s response to the health, social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, enhancing what was an already broad, long-standing bilateral relationship.

Despite a high COVID-19 case load – with 1.5 million cases recorded in official statistics up to July 2021 – Bangladesh’s COVID-19 reported death rate remained comparatively low. **However, the national health system was under pressure during peak virus transmission periods, widening the impact of the pandemic.** The Bangladesh National Vaccination program, initially targeting elderly and vulnerable people, reached ten per cent of Bangladesh’s 163 million people and over 39,000 Rohingya refugees with at least one COVID-19 vaccination dose by late August 2021. Procuring enough vaccines to achieve high vaccination coverage across the country remains a key government priority.

To contain COVID-19 and moderate the impact on the health system, the Bangladesh Government imposed prolonged movement and travel restrictions, limitations on school and business operations, and – in Cox’s Bazar – strict entry and program implementation restrictions for humanitarian services in the Rohingya refugee camps. **Following initial lockdowns in the first phase of the pandemic, 40 per cent of breadwinners recorded a drop in income and 60 per cent of businesses reduced profits.** In response, the government provided stimulus packages (amounting to 24 per cent of the annual gross domestic product), which included loan assistance and cash support for affected industries, businesses, and individual workers. COVID-19 widened existing income and health disparities: the impacts of the virus were disproportionately felt by women and people with disabilities. Analysis by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) found that **young Bangladeshi women were three times more likely than young men to be out of work because of the pandemic.** There is evidence that lockdowns and education stoppages contributed to a rise in domestic violence, child marriage and related protection concerns– including in the Rohingya refugee camps.

Despite Bangladesh’s strong economic progress over the last decade, the World Bank reported an increase in poverty for the first time in two decades– recording 24 million ‘new poor’ in 2021. **With 37 per cent of the population below the national poverty line, poverty reduction and income equality remain priorities for Bangladesh.** Good prospects for future growth position Bangladesh well to address the medium-term impact of COVID-19 on poverty and social exclusion and increase its resilience to future shocks through investment in social infrastructure including health services. Bangladesh will need continued support in hosting the Rohingya refugee population in Cox’s Bazar in accordance with the UN-Bangladesh Government Joint Response Plan.

AUSTRALIA'S RESPONSE AND PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Australia's development program continues to align with government priorities and deliver across the pillars of the *Partnerships for Recovery* framework. Despite a difficult operating environment, most investments were able to adapt their activities to suit the COVID-19 context, while still making progress towards expected outcomes.

Health Security

Australia's support bolstered government and Bangladeshi NGO COVID-19 response and recovery efforts. In immediate response to the pandemic, our partner **BRAC provided health information and awareness on COVID-19 to approximately five million households** and produced educational videos on COVID-19 prevention (viewed online 37 million times). With Australia's support, community health workers delivered information pamphlets to houses in poor communities, providing them with the opportunity to talk with residents and give them clear information on how to protect themselves and their communities. Further health equipment and systems training was also provided. The difficulties faced by Bangladesh in managing the health impact of COVID-19 have provided an impetus for Australia's development program to consider how public institutions' capacity and resilience can be better supported across its investments, not just those focused on emergency and health responses.

Australian partners (including UN agencies and international and Australian NGOs) supported government-led efforts to contain and respond to COVID-19 in the Cox's Bazar refugee camps, where the virus's prevalence and death rates were generally lower than across the country. Through the Bangladesh Rohingya and Host Community Humanitarian Response Package, **partners delivered COVID-19 prevention messages to over 127,024 refugees and host community members**, with 118,443 people participating in interactive COVID-19 awareness sessions. Australian support allowed 157,000 personal protective equipment items to be distributed to frontline workers, and improved access to safe water and sanitation in Rohingya and host communities, critically underpinning COVID-19 hygiene measures. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) provided sexual and reproductive health and rights assistance to women and girls even when health systems focused on the COVID-19 response.

In June 2021, \$5 million from Australia's regional COVID-19 response was directed to Bangladesh, enabling the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) to purchase oxygen related equipment and other essential supplies. By the end of August 2021, BDRCS had delivered oxygen support to over 3,200 people, provided 1,786 people with free COVID-19 medical transport and distributed over 133,400 cooked meals across 17 of Bangladesh's most affected districts. This is in addition to Australia's support to the COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX) Advance Market Commitment totalling \$130 million. At 30 June 2021, this global mechanism had **delivered 100,620 COVID-19 vaccine doses to Bangladesh**. The Australian development program also re-positioned funding to provide emergency food assistance to affected students, vulnerable people and households in remote locations.

Stability

Responding to the unequal social impacts of the pandemic and building on previous support for social protection policy reform, Australia extended its partnership with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) by another two years (to 2023) to work within central ministries to **support the government's goal of an inclusive, multi-tiered social security system with improved effectiveness, efficiency and reach**. The program will work closely with the Cabinet Division and the Planning Ministry to develop a medium-term COVID-19 social security response to assist those most affected by the pandemic, increase coverage of the old age and disability pensions, and develop a road map for the next series of social protection reforms.

Noting prevalent malnutrition and low food security rates across Bangladesh, Australia partnered with the World Food Programme (WFP) to support the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs (MoWCA) in **scaling up and expanding coverage of two flagship social safety net programs**, the Mother and Child Benefit Program (MCBP) and Vulnerable Women Benefit (VWB) Program. With nutrition education for expecting and new mothers, and top-up funds when they purchase nutritious food, this investment also will improve food security for mothers and their children.

Our support to BRAC and the Underprivileged Children's Educational Programs (UCEP) continued to enable extremely poor children, especially girls and children with disabilities, to access quality basic education. With schools closed for most of 2020 and 2021, **our partners helped to keep students connected, engaged, and learning through national television broadcasts and innovative methods** including using basic feature mobile phones, community radio, and small community-based learning circles. In 2020, Australia supported a total of 118,840 additional school enrolments, with 109,868 children (55 per cent girls and two per cent people with disabilities) enrolled in BRAC schools and 8,972 (50 per cent girls, five per cent people with disabilities) in UCEP schools (exceeding UCEP's target of 6,485). Partners also provided expert trainers to deliver and record lessons for the Bangladesh Government's national drive to digitise lessons for television broadcast.

Some efforts to build the resilience of Rohingya refugees and host communities (including education, cash-for-work and skills development programs) were constrained by COVID-19 restrictions. Despite these restrictions, WFP, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and International Organization for Migration continued to provide lifesaving assistance to refugee and host community members, including targeted support for people with disabilities. Australia provided over \$10 million to support the response to a large fire in the camps in March. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), BRAC and the Global Partnership for Education supported remote education delivery through carer-led learning programs. Where possible, UNHCR, UNFPA and UN Women supported families' continued access to critical protection, gender-based violence and psychosocial support through remote and community-based mechanisms.

Economic recovery

Australia's development program to Bangladesh has a strong focus on supporting the development of a skilled workforce necessary for the country's economic recovery from COVID-19 and longer-term economic growth. Despite the difficulties imposed by the pandemic, **our partners continued to ensure youth could benefit from online classes, partial re-opening of training institutes and industry-based apprenticeships**. Over the reporting period, Australia supported 10,935 young men and women (including people with disabilities) to receive technical and vocational training in line with industry needs: 5,431 (74 per cent women, nine per cent people with disabilities) received vocational skills training in BRAC's Skills Development Program and 5,504 (37 per cent women, three per cent people with disabilities) in UCEP's Technical Education Program.

Australia's long-running partnership with BRAC also has **a significant pillar of work focused on building pathways out of poverty through industry-relevant skills development**. Supporting key government institutions, BRAC has developed Technical and Vocational Education (TVET) curricula for services sectors and an education program that supports government delivery of teaching, including remote delivery. The Australia Awards program also continued over the reporting period. In 2020, 100 scholars (50 per cent women, four people with disabilities) were studying in Australia.

By extending the UNDP partnership in the reporting period, Australia looked to strengthen social security and pathways for the urban poor and vulnerable throughout their lives, effectively tackle and prevent poverty and inequality and contribute to broader human development, employment and economic growth. Enhanced safety nets will give households and individuals greater confidence to invest in their human development and income-generating activities, increase consumption and to take on greater risk. The recent signing of a Trade and Investment Framework Arrangement between Bangladesh and Australia will also help drive increased trade and investment between the two countries, with economic and job creation benefits for Bangladesh.

ANNEX 1: PROGRESS AGAINST COVID-19 RESPONSE PLAN RESULTS INDICATORS

Health Security

Key Results Indicators	Progress/Result
327,500 women, men, girls and boys provided with emergency assistance* (excluding Cox's Bazar District, which is reported below)	Emergency assistance to 231,735 people **, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Food packages for 3,217 disadvantaged students (81 per cent girls, 11 per cent people with disabilities); - Food assistance to 83,978 people in remote and hard to reach locations (disaggregated data not yet available); and - Additional food assistance for 144,540 vulnerable people (50 per cent women).
660,600 vulnerable Rohingya and host community women, men, girls and boys provided with life-saving assistance in crisis situations	Supported 691,653 instances of life-saving assistance to vulnerable Rohingya and host communities (58 per cent women, 22 per cent children).
136,000 Rohingya and local Bangladeshis in Cox's Bazar benefiting from improved water and hygiene activities	Supported 127,024 Rohingya and host community members with improved water and hygiene activities. Shortfall on this target is due to restrictions caused by COVID-19. (This result is separate to COVID-19 specific interactive health promotion activities, which reached over 118,443 people refugee and host community members.) Disaggregated data not yet available.

Stability

Key Results Indicators	Progress/Result
Strengthened governance systems for social protection (including examples of assistance provided and significant policy change achieved)	Established new partnership with UNDP for technical assistance to the Bangladesh Government on social protection. Partnered with WFP to support the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs to expand coverage of two of its flagship social safety net programs (MCBP and VWB) by 500,000 families in urban areas.
Bangladesh is supported with technical advice on building capacity for food security (including examples of assistance provided and results achieved)	The Australian Centre for Agricultural Research (ACIAR) continued to run a successful research program in Bangladesh. A key ACIAR project modelled mitigation and adaptation of agricultural practices in response to climate-related changes, with other projects focused on mungbean improvement and sharing of successful regional approaches to rural transformation.
340,000 additional girls and boys enrolled in school*	Supported 118,840 additional school enrolments, with 109,868 children (55 per cent girls and two per cent people with disabilities) enrolled in BRAC schools and 8,972 (50 per cent girls, five per cent people with disabilities) in UCEP schools. Increased enrolment has been difficult in light of long-term school closures caused by COVID-19.**

Key Results Indicators	Progress/Result
Examples of young women empowered to influence policies, regulations and norms which obstruct the rights and potential of all women.	Supported awareness raising for girls and women on their rights, how to resist exploitation and how to become more involved in public life and local governance. An example outcome was support to women-led community-based organisations to prevent 1,091 child marriages.** Supported women from 333 community-based organisations to assume leadership roles on economic inclusion, development, gender equality and enhancing access to public services.
45,000 Rohingya and host community children reached with basic education services (primary school or emergency basic learning)	Against this 2-year target, 29,342 children in the Rohingya refugee camps and host communities reached with primary or emergency basic education. Additionally, through the Global Partnership for Education, supported 3,441 children in the Rohingya refugee camps and host communities to receive caregiver led education.

Economic Recovery

Key Results Indicators	Progress/Result
18,500 young women and men supported through skills training and experience*	Supported 10,935 young men and women with skills training and on-the-job experience. 5,431 (74 per cent women, nine per cent people with disabilities) received vocational skills training and 5,504 (37 per cent women, three per cent people with disabilities) received on-the-job experience.**
Examples of private sector, including women entrepreneurs, provided with financial and/or business development services	19,028 people (61 per cent women) gained access to formal financial services through linkage meetings and workshops with local financial service providers.
Specific activities for the promotion of trade and investment opportunities between Australia and Bangladesh	The Bangladesh-Australia Trade and Investment Framework Arrangement was developed over the reporting period, then signed on 15 September 2021.

* This results indicator covers a 2-year period, to align with the timespan of the COVID Development Response Plan.

** This result reports on the first year of a two-year target.

ANNEX 2: INVESTMENT PERFORMANCE RATINGS

Investment Details	Year	Effectiveness	Efficiency	Gender Equality
Strategic Partnership Arrangement with BRAC Phase 2 Investment duration: 2016-21; Budget: \$114.5m	2021	5	5	5
	2020	5	5	5
Skills for Economic Growth and Prosperity Investment duration: 2018-22; Budget: \$12m	2021	4	5	4
	2020	5	5	4
Bangladesh Rohingya and Host Community Package Investment duration: 2020-2022; Budget: \$79.7m in 2020-21	2021	4	5	5
	2020	n/a	n/a	n/a

Definitions of rating scale:

Satisfactory (4, 5 and 6)

6 = Very good; satisfies criteria in all areas.

5 = Good; satisfies criteria in almost all areas.

4 = Adequate; on balance, satisfies criteria; does not fail in any major area.

Less than satisfactory (1, 2 and 3)

3 = Less than adequate; on balance does not satisfy criteria and/or fails in at least one major area.

2 = Poor; does not satisfy criteria in major areas.

1 = Very poor; does not satisfy criteria in many major area.