



NORWEGIAN CAPACITY  
OPERATED BY NRC



# Independent review of CashCap support to the Rohingya Crisis Bangladesh 2017-2019

## Executive Summary

Author: Lois Austin – Independent Consultant

NOVEMBER 2018 | CASHCAP INDEPENDENT REVIEW

Independent review of CashCap support to the Rohingya crisis, Bangladesh 2017-2019 |  
November 2018  
© Norwegian Refugee Council  
Contact: [norcap@nrc.no](mailto:norcap@nrc.no)

---

# 1 Executive Summary

CashCap is an inter-agency project, managed by NORCAP, the Norwegian Refugee Council's global provider of expertise to the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding sectors. CashCap has been deploying senior experts to provide inter-agency support with the aim of increasing the use and effectiveness of cash and markets programming in crisis contexts since 2016.

In early October 2017, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) requested support from CashCap with the initial aim of establishing a platform for the coordination of cash-based interventions (CBI) for the Rohingya refugee population following a large-scale exodus of this vulnerable group from Myanmar into Bangladesh.

Since then, CashCap has deployed three experts with the aim of putting in place and maintaining CBI coordination mechanisms; providing technical and capacity building support; and pursuing CBI-focused advocacy. In part due to the different phases of the crisis into which the deployments took place, but also linked with each expert's skills and capacities, the deployments have taken on the following focus:

## **Deployment 1**

**October – December 2017**

Key focus on establishment of a coordination platform and inclusion of CBI into initial assessments and response analysis

## **Deployment 2**

**January – June 2018**

Key focus on linking the Cash Working Group (CWG) to the wider humanitarian system and providing technical support and CBI evidence-building

## **Deployment 3**

**August 2018 – February 2019**

Key focus on advocacy towards the government in relation to CBIs and supporting high-level decision-makers include CBI-thinking into ongoing response analysis.

The experts have been deployed over a 16-month timeframe. This length of support, provided through the three deployments, has been necessary due to the different focus priorities of each deployment. Due to the complex political and humanitarian environment, advocacy towards the government, which was the focus of the third and final deployment, needed to be undertaken by a neutral person/body. As noted by key stakeholders CashCap was ideally placed to offer this form of support and there would have been few, if any, equally neutral alternatives leading to a longer-than-usual support from CashCap.

The review has been undertaken by an independent consultant and has focused on qualitative data collection and analysis through interviewing key stakeholders and reviewing relevant documentation. A total of 20 semi-structured interviews were undertaken with deployed CashCap experts and other stakeholders involved in the Rohingya crisis humanitarian response including the host agency, donors and operational agencies. A number of interviews were undertaken remotely but a brief visit to Cox's Bazar allowed for in-person interviews as well as a visit to Kutupalong refugee camp.

The purpose of the review is to assess the relevance, effectiveness, impact and sustainability of the support provided by CashCap to the humanitarian response in Cox's Bazar in 2017 and 2018. Primary users of the review will be the NORCAP Department and the CashCap Steering Committee. The report will also be shared with an external audience including CashCap partners, relevant stakeholders and donors.

## Findings

The review has made 13 findings in relation to the relevance, effectiveness and sustainability of the CashCap deployments to support the Rohingya crisis response.

### Relevance

#### **Finding #1 CBI coordination**

The provision of cash-based assistance to those affected by disaster is not new in Bangladesh. However, a number of barriers exist in relation to implementing cash-based interventions for the benefit of the Rohingya refugee population. This has resulted in an uncoordinated approach to CBIs by the variety of humanitarian agencies responding to the crisis. Within this environment, the support of CashCap in the creation of a CWG to promote harmonisation and alignment in relation to CBIs has been essential.

#### **Finding #2 Humanitarian response analysis**

During the early stages of the response, CashCap was able to highlight a number of critical cash-related factors for humanitarian agencies to consider in their humanitarian response analysis.

### Effectiveness

#### **Finding #3 Deployment ToR**

Linked to the limited capacity of the requesting organization to grasp what would be practically achievable within short deployment timeframes, the ToR for each deployment were extensive, unrealistic and overly-ambitious. This has necessitated each expert taking time to define a more realistic and achievable work plan at the start of each deployment.

#### **Finding #4 Workplan prioritisation**

Based on tailored workplans, and in a complex and overwhelming operating environment, each CashCap expert has succeeded in achieving agreed objectives within the priority areas of coordination and information management; technical and capacity building support; and advocacy. In spite of the all-encompassing deployment ToR, each expert has managed to focus on priorities that have been most relevant during their individual deployment timeframes.

#### **Finding #5 Hindering and facilitating factors**

Whilst a small number of factors have facilitated the ability of the deployed CashCap experts to achieve the objectives set out in their ToR, there have been a significant number of hindering factors which threatened to stand in the way of progress. These have included external factors such as lack of Government support for CBIs, as well as internal factors such as unrealistic ToRs.

#### **Finding #6 CashCap Head Office support**

Support from the CashCap Head Office has been important in order to ensure that experts with the most appropriate profiles were deployed over the 16-month timeframe during which CashCap support has been provided. The visit of the CashCap Project Manager at the start of the third deployment was seen as particularly useful in order to ensure agreement on the priorities for the final deployment.

#### **Finding #7 Tools, templates and structure**

Through the establishment and chairing of the CWG, CashCap experts have provided a structure for CBI discussions and harmonisation which previously did not exist. The development of tools and templates to support CBIs has improved the quality of these activities and laid the groundwork for further alignment should the opportunity to implement at scale arise in the future.

#### **Finding #8 Hand over between experts**

The lack of in-person hand overs from one expert to the next, combined with gaps between the deployments, have resulted in gaps in information-sharing and delays in relation to progressing some key CBI-related activities. The gaps between the deployments were as a result of lack of clarity from the host organisation with regard to the profiles required combined with the late submission of a request for the third deployment (which was only submitted after the second expert had departed).

#### **Finding ##9 Host organisation challenges**

The host organisation and other stakeholders faced limited, if any, challenges in relation to hosting a CashCap expert. The only challenges noted were that not all of the experts deployed possessed both the technical and strategic skills and capacities that were desired throughout the deployment timeframes – which is unsurprising given the breadth of skills required – and the host agency and humanitarian community’s lack of clarity and precision with regard to the profile it was seeking.

#### **Finding #10 Alternatives to CashCap**

Due to CashCap’s neutrality and independence, there have been no alternative options which could have ensured the successful coordination and promotion of CBIs or provided the requisite unbiased technical support that operational agencies have needed in order to meet the needs of the refugee population.

#### **Sustainability**

##### **Finding #11 CWG sustainability**

The establishment and continuation of the CWG by the deployed CashCap experts is a key feature of critical sustainability in terms of ensuring long term coordination of CBIs.

##### **Finding #12 National Cash Officer recruitment**

The successful recruitment of a national cash officer has been important to ensure continuity of effort in relation to CBIs. However, due to the complex and sensitive political environment, there remains the need for an international staff member to continue providing technical support and undertake advocacy in relation to CBIs.

##### **Finding #13 Exit strategy**

The absence of a clear exit strategy from the final CashCap deployment remains an issue in the last few months of the deployment. Having a clear exit strategy from the outset, although challenging to define, would have been beneficial in order to ensure that all stakeholders have a full understanding of how CBI will be coordinated in the next stage of the response.

## **Conclusions and recommendations**

The CashCap experts deployed into a difficult coordination context. A central feature of this complex coordination environment was the absence of support from the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) for the provision of cash transfers to the refugee population. Regardless of the many challenges faced through the three deployments, CashCap has been instrumental in moving forward the cash agenda in support of the Rohingya refugee population. The creation of a functioning CWG combined with the development of a series of tools and guidance to support cash actors has been critical for supporting ongoing programming as well as creating the foundation for future scaled up and multi-purpose cash assistance, should the opportunity arise.

Since the first deployment, the CashCap experts have been adept at articulating the reality that the refugee population, and to an extent the host communities, are facing and advocate for the use of CBIs to address the range of needs that the population faces.

By the third deployment, engagement with government at a local level has been extremely focused. This has then been stretched upwards to the Dhaka level where there was previously little connection (in part due to limited time and capacity to make these links).

Based on the key findings above, a set of seven associated recommendations for future consideration are provided here.

#### **Relevance**

As noted in the initial 2017 HRP and subsequent 2018 JRP, the need to explore the feasibility of CBIs, including the provision of unconditional and multi-purpose cash, for the Rohingya refugee population has been high since the outset of the humanitarian response. In an environment where there continue to be political barriers to the provision of cash and where humanitarian agencies were working in an uncoordinated manner, the opportunities for scaling up CBIs were limited. Within this environment, the support provided by CashCap in terms of putting in place essential cash coordination structures; providing technical support to CWG members; and developing advocacy messages on the importance of CBI has been highly relevant to the needs of the refugee population.

### **Effectiveness**

#### **Expert ToRs:**

The ToRs for each of the experts were long, broad and included an unrealistic set of key tasks for short-term deployments. This resulted, on arrival, in each expert undertaking a self-selection of the most urgent and feasible tasks that could be undertaken within the deployment timeframe.

**Recommendation 1:** Prior to deployment, the CashCap Project Manager (possibly in conjunction with the relevant Rapid Response Team support person) should assess deployment ToRs and undertake an initial prioritisation of tasks for the expert. This should help orient the expert in the initial stages of their deployment.

#### **Gaps and handovers:**

The inability of any of the experts to provide an in-person hand over to their successor has been a hinderance in terms of ensuring a smooth transition from one person to the next. This has also led to some frustration among CWG members who have seen a lack of consistency in approach. A more formal approach to handovers, which goes beyond a Skype briefing and the provision of some hand over notes, is required. More broadly within CashCap, there is a lack of clarity as to when a hand over can be considered completed.

**Recommendation 2:** With future consecutive deployments, there is a need for CashCap head office to engage with the requesting organisation sufficiently early to ensure the potential for hand over between experts.

Where this is not possible, the potential for experts to go back and help establish their successor, particularly where there are complex issues to hand over, should be considered.

In addition, when one expert is handing over to another, there is a need for both agree when the hand over is considered complete.

#### **The role of the expert:**

In this response, having the CashCap expert as the CWG Coordinator has been essential due to the complexity of the environment and the need to create the CWG from scratch. However, this has resulted in the expert having to play multiple roles in relation to advocacy, technical expert as well as chair of the CWG.

**Recommendation 3:** In future deployments, and in the interests of sustainability, it is recommended that CashCap experts should provide support to the chair of the CWG as opposed to taking on this role.

#### **Skills and capacities:**

The humanitarian response to the Rohingya crisis is in itself complex due to the scale of needs; the sensitive political environment; the pressured coordination structures; and the multiplicity of actors. Within the vast range of other coordination activities and ongoing operational responses, the role of the CWG Coordinator (the CashCap expert) has been critical in terms of being able to operate at both strategic and technical levels. It has not been possible for all three deployed experts to efficiently straddle both the strategic and technical elements of their role.

**Recommendation 4:** Future deployments into such complicated and sensitive humanitarian response environments require further clarity and precision from the host organisation on exactly what

skills and capacities will be required from CashCap experts at each stage of the response. CashCap itself needs to ensure that in future, only experts with significant years of experience of undertaking strategic level dialogue are deployed into such environments where both humanitarian coordination and government coordination mechanisms and processes are highly complex.

### Sustainability

#### Exit strategies:

As the end of the last CashCap expert deployment nears, there is no clear strategy in place to ensure the continuation of some of the key systems and structures that have been put in place during the experts' deployment timeframes. The CWG is still seeking a permanent coordinator – a position currently filled by the CashCap expert. This is critical to ensure the continuation of the group and ensure continued information-sharing in order to avoid agencies reverting to unharmonised approaches to CBI which in itself acts as a potential barrier to scaling up this form of support.

**Recommendation 5:** Future CashCap deployments should have established and documented exit strategies from the outset. Whilst these can be amended if required, having a clear approach to ensuring the continuation of work undertaken during deployment timeframes is important in terms of guiding deployment activities and ensuring sustainability.

#### National and international engagement:

The recruitment of a national cash officer to support the CashCap expert (and to support the co-chairs of the CWG) is considered to be important to ensure both consistency and sustainability. Having this position has set the groundwork for a continuity of approach even when CashCap deployments are over. There are some limitations to what a national officer can achieve though, particularly in relation to advocacy with the government, and possibly technical and coordination skills, highlighting the need for a continued international representation for CBIs.

**Recommendation 6:** Where possible, future CashCap deployments should seek to recruit a national cash officer who the expert can mentor (if necessary). Upon the expert's departure, most, if not all, activities can be continued by this officer. The recruitment of the national cash officer should be a collective responsibility of the CWG in order to facilitate sustainability and exit.

#### Tool repository

Together with the CWG members, the CashCap experts have created a number of tools, templates and guidance to support harmonisation of CBIs. However, locating these on the CWG Google Drive is difficult due to the large number of other documents that have been uploaded.

**Recommendation 7:** In future deployments, CashCap experts should create a repository which contains all the tools, templates and guidelines as well as other documented outputs from their deployments. This will facilitate access to these outputs by other CashCap experts and will allow for easier hand over from one expert to another.



NORWEGIAN  
REFUGEE COUNCIL

[www.nrc.no](http://www.nrc.no)

Norwegian Refugee Council  
Postboks 148 Sentrum  
0102 Oslo, Norway