Key messages

- Responding to emergency needs of people affected by monsoon floods in North West and South-East districts, and in the Southern island of Hatia should be maintained.

- Support for early recovery needs of those affected by repeated water-logging in the South-West, in sectors of food assistance, shelter, water and sanitation facilities, and livelihood support should continue.

- Continuing to ensure that unregistered Rohingya refugees living in makeshift camps have access to basic services such as safe drinking water, adequate sanitation, shelter and medical care remains vital.

- Increased emphasis should be placed on Disaster Risk Reduction activities and emergency preparedness in this country which is particularly vulnerable to climate change and natural disasters.

- The facilitation of humanitarian coordination in the country must be boosted.

Humanitarian situation and needs
Background and/or Situation in Country

Bangladesh, a mostly low-lying country with the world’s highest population density, is considered to be one of the countries most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and frequent natural disasters. Continuing population growth and environmental degradation could further exacerbate the intensity of disasters in the future, contributing to a significant increase in humanitarian needs.

NATURAL DISASTERS

Cyclones and floods occur frequently. In 2012, heavy monsoon rains and flash floods destroyed homes and crops in several parts of Bangladesh affecting around 261,000 families (1.3 million individuals). The districts of Chittagong, Bandarban, Cox’s Bazaar, Jamalpur, Kurigram, Gaibandha were most affected. The rains forced people to seek refuge in temporary shelters where, almost a year on, many still require food assistance, water and sanitation facilities, as well as shelters and livelihood support to go back to their villages and rebuild their lives.

Three sets of flash floods also hit also the districts of the north west at critical times of the agricultural season during the year, while a tropical storm had a severe impact on shelters and livelihood of people living on the southern island of Hatiya in Noakhali district.

The monsoon floods of 2011 had already affected over a million people and displaced some 200,000. Several areas in the south-west of the country remain water-logged, with people in need of food and livelihood support.

In addition to these frequent natural disasters, the threat of earthquakes is present in the eastern part of the country, including the capital city Dhaka. The low level of preparedness and current emergency response capacities, as well as the huge vulnerability of most of the infrastructure, point to this sector as a priority for the future.

ROHINGYA REFUGEES

Bangladesh is also host to one of the most intractable refugee crises in the world: the Rohingyas, an ethnic, religious and linguistic minority subjected to exclusion and discrimination in their home country of Myanmar, have been seeking refuge in neighbouring Bangladesh (the first arriving some 30 years ago). The majority are denied refugee status by the Bangladeshi authorities. Thus, without legal status they are unable to pursue education and formal employment opportunities and remain vulnerable to exploitation and mistreatment.

NUTRITION

An estimated 500,000 children suffer from severe acute malnutrition annually in Bangladesh. Among children under five years of age, 48 per cent are stunted and 13.5 per cent are acutely malnourished, of which 3.4 per cent are suffering from severe acute malnutrition (source: National CMAM Guideline, GoB Sept 2011). The mental and physical damage caused by severe malnutrition in the early years of childhood is permanent.

Surveys by the World Food Programme have also revealed worrying levels of food insecurity in the Chittagong Hills Tract area of eastern Bangladesh, caused by the past conflict in this area, land scarcity and an invasion of rodents.

The European Union's Humanitarian Response

The European Commission’s Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department (ECHO) has been working in Bangladesh for many years, both in disaster preparedness and emergency response activities. It continues to support people affected by the 2011 and 2012 floods through livelihood and
nutrition programmes, and remains committed to providing basic life saving support to an estimated 45,000 unregistered Rohingya refugees living in makeshift camps in Leda and Kutupalong.

After channelling a total of €19.65 million in humanitarian funding to Bangladesh in 2012, ECHO has allocated €11 million to Bangladesh to address the continuing humanitarian needs in 2013. The funds will provide flood-resilient shelters and livelihood and nutrition support to people affected by last year’s floods as well as to those hit by water-logging in south-west Bangladesh. Funds also support the nutrition, water and sanitation and healthcare needs of unregistered Rohingya refugees living in Kutupalong and Leda makeshift camps, along with those of the local population of Ukhia and Teknaf districts. In the neighbouring Chittagong Hills Tract, people also benefit from livelihood and food assistance.

ECHO also continues to fund community-based disaster preparedness programmes, supporting initiatives such as the building of flood-resistant infrastructure and early warning systems, amongst others. The European Commission has allocated €3.65 million for Disaster Risk Reduction projects in 2013 and 2014. It has contributed €12.65 million since 2001 to this end.

**OUTREACH AND COORDINATION WITH HUMANITARIAN PARTNERS**

In order to enhance the coordination and harmonization of humanitarian response, ECHO funds a UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) staff member to support the UN Resident Coordinator in Bangladesh. ECHO also facilitates coordination between partner organizations and local, national and regional level stakeholders in humanitarian response. As of this year, the food security cluster lead by WFP and FAO, as well as the Nutrition cluster lead by Unicef, are also supported by ECHO.

**MAJOR CHALLENGES IN DELIVERING AID**

- The reluctance of authorities to confer a disaster status to some life-threatening events can reduce timeliness of humanitarian response.

- Delays from authorities in authorizing approval for partners to respond to emergencies also hinders humanitarian response.

- The reluctance of authorities to authorize provision of assistance to the unregistered Rohingya refugees has hampered humanitarian response.