

Joint Humanitarian Community Press Release

Humanitarian partners complete distribution of over 2.8 million masks across all Rohingya refugee settlements and all 8 Upazilas throughout Cox's Bazar District

Cox's Bazar, 21 October 2020

Humanitarian partners completed the distribution of over 2,855,850 million reusable masks in all 34 Rohingya refugee settlements in Cox's Bazar and all 8 Upazilas throughout Cox's Bazar District, as a critical measure for preventing the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. To mitigate the loss of livelihoods and devastating economic impacts of COVID-19 and fill gaps in global supply chains, the Food Security Sector's Livelihoods Working Group (LHWG) partners have worked closely with government authorities in Cox's Bazar to jumpstart the production of masks as an income-generating activity engaging more than 2,480 skilled tailors in both the refugee camps and in the host community. Working through a multi-sector approach, LHWG established this multi-partner mask-making initiative in late March to fill the gaps left by global supply chains and boost incomes of families bearing the brunt of COVID-19 economic repercussions.

The reusable masks have been produced by local tailors and 2,855,850 distributed to both refugees and host communities, together with visual guidelines on how to effectively wear and wash the masks. Each person over 5 years old received two masks made by three layers of breathable weave fabric in alignment with [WHO guidance](#) and approved by the Cox's Bazar Civil Surgeon. Before it was possible to distribute masks across all 34 camps, the first distributions prioritized the most vulnerable groups such as older persons, volunteers and individuals attending distributions sites who were more frequently in contact with others, and for use in Women Friendly Spaces where women and girls seek services and support for gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health and rights. In the host communities, more than 1.255 million reusable cloth masks have been distributed to more than 627,700 vulnerable Bangladeshis living in all 8 Upazilas of Cox's Bazar District and in the camps more than 1.6 million masks have been distributed to all Rohingya individuals aged 5 and above (728,216 individuals), ensuring coverage of at least two masks per person.

This rapid volume of production was achieved by the combined efforts across Sectors of the humanitarian response, including 40 national and international NGOs, UN Agencies and partners who have worked with Rohingya refugees and the host communities to produce the masks as well as to disseminate messaging on their importance for helping prevent transmission of the virus. Through this initiative, Rohingya and host communities have come together as frontline workers in the emergency response to protect their families and communities, producing and distributing masks to fill a significant gap of personal protective equipment (PPE) in the local market.

The mask-making initiative has provided so far a critical livelihoods opportunity for refugees and vulnerable Bangladeshis in Cox's Bazar, including female-headed households, to sustain their families' basic needs, and successfully linked local production and supply with demand. Since 2017, thousands of men and women trainees have received skills development trainings organized by the LHWG and as a result, the 2,480 local tailors were already prepared to launch the local production of reusable cloth masks. These initiatives, which will continue until the end of the year, have also built portable skills and knowledge, which will support Rohingya refugees in their reintegration in Myanmar, once conditions allow them to return home in safety and dignity.

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For further information please visit the [Food Security Sector and Livelihoods Working Group website](#) or contact LHWG Coordinator (leah.beaulac@wfp.org) and Information Management Officer (ajmerry.hossain@wfp.org) in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

Note: Food Security Sector (FSS) is co-led by WFP and FAO. Within the Inter-Sector Coordination Group (ISCG) in Cox's Bazar, the FSS is a platform to strengthen the food security response through operational coordination, information sharing, and identifying priorities and solutions related to food security. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, FSS partners adapted their delivery of assistance to mitigate the risks of infection. Further, unconditional food and cash assistance have been provided to vulnerable Bangladeshi households in all Upazilas of Cox's Bazar District to improve food security and compensate for the economic repercussions of COVID-19.

Livelihoods Working Group (LHWG): Under the FSS, the LHWG is working to strengthen coordination and technical support of the livelihood activities in the host community and Rohingya refugee camps LHWG is supporting the operational coordination of production and distribution of masks as a local livelihoods opportunity in the camps and host community.