

Humanitarian Play Labs



Goal: To enable displaced Rohingya and host community children living in and around the settlements of Cox's Bazar to learn, heal, and grow through play-based early childhood development.

41
thousand

Children from 0-6 years old reached with play-based learning

1,454

Center- and home-based Child Friendly Spaces in Rohingya settlements and host communities

1,316

Young women in Rohingya settlements and host communities serving as Play Leaders

Background

Nearly one million displaced Rohingya are living in crowded settlements in the Cox's Bazar district of southern Bangladesh, having fled persecution in Myanmar. Violence against the Rohingya has persisted for decades, but the mass exodus that began in August 2017 affected hundreds of thousands of children and their families. Cox's Bazar is now the most densely populated refugee settlement in the world according to the UNHCR.

Over half of the newly displaced Rohingya are children, and almost 20 percent are under age five.

Opportunity

In emergency and humanitarian contexts like Cox's Bazar, children are extremely vulnerable to abuse, violence, and trafficking. It is vital to provide these

children – and their caregivers – with psychosocial support, safe spaces, and playful early learning and stimulation opportunities to help address trauma, support their healthy development, provide a sense of routine and normalcy, and improve access to education.

Recent research shows that the early years of a child's life set the foundations of their future health, social emotional development, and mental well-being. Nearly 80% of a child's brain development occurs before age three. Creating opportunities for children to learn through play is a proven method of fostering healthy brain development and a diverse set of skills. Play is especially important for children in fragile settings, who are often exposed to violence and poverty, as play helps children better manage trauma.



A girl in a Humanitarian Play Lab ©BRAC



Children gathered in a Humanitarian Play Lab ©BRAC

Approach

BRAC's approach was developed by integrating a play-based curriculum with child protection and psychosocial support pathways. Children are engaged and provided with stimulation that boosts their socio-emotional, cognitive, and language development, while promoting resilience, and establishing a sense of normalcy. Our Humanitarian Play Labs use a curriculum designed by experts in early childhood development, which incorporates traditional Rohingya songs, games, rhymes, and activities to support children's language, motor, cognitive, and socio-emotional development.

The Humanitarian Play Lab model is designed to preserve culture and heritage through activities and spaces tailored to the target Rohingya community, as well as build resilience in children in fragile settings through a focus on early childhood stimulus and development of self-regulation. The HPL model also aims to nurture spontaneity through engagement in a play-based curriculum that encourages language, cognitive, motor, and socio-emotional development. Finally, it works to foster a sense of community among displaced peoples by creating a supportive environment for mothers and children.

With the support of the LEGO Foundation, BRAC will partner with the Sesame Workshop to scale up the Humanitarian Play Labs for Rohingya and host community children to learn and heal through play.

In addition to providing safe learning spaces for children aged 2-6, the Humanitarian Play Lab model also provides support to mothers and infants from 0-2 through home visits and psychosocial support. BRAC currently operates 1,354 center- and home-based Humanitarian Play Labs, and 100 Play Labs in surrounding host communities. Many of the host community Play Labs are co-located with government primary schools to facilitate learning about play-based approaches with primary teachers and facilitate the transition to primary school.

Why BRAC?

Founded in Bangladesh in 1972 as a small relief effort, BRAC is now one of the largest development organizations in the world. With over four decades of experience working in nearly every corner of Bangladesh, we have a deep knowledge of the context and strong relationships with local communities. As a result, when the refugee crisis began, BRAC mobilized resources from across the country in a matter of days. Our 2,500 staff in Cox's Bazar provide a range of services including child protection, health, water, sanitation, nutrition, education, and shelter, in collaboration with UN agencies, governments, and other NGOs.

“
Above all else, we want everyone who comes through these doors to know that they are safe here,” says **Hamida Akhter Jahan, psychosocial counselor, BRAC.** **“While the situation outside may be uncertain, children can come here every day and be themselves. They can be happy and free.”**”