

 Bangladesh

# Maintaining relationships with communities during COVID-19 in Bangladesh

By Renee Wolforth, Protection Coordinator at Oxfam from November 2019 to October 2020

Community-based protection (CBP) and all related activities were severely hampered by the lockdown and movement restrictions put in place in Bangladesh's refugee camps in March 2020 by the government in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In light of lack of access to camps, the Oxfam's protection team was, for instance, unable to gather information on protection concerns through focus group discussions, key informant interviews or household surveys. However, we immediately shifted these activities from in-person to remote modalities, relying on information shared by a network of community protection structures and actors that had been developed over the previous two years of the programme. This network includes community-based volunteers (CBVs) from both refugee and host communities, protection committees, [women participants of a training on human trafficking](#), and religious and community leaders, among others.

This network provided essential information to the team on protection risks. Issues such as the decrease in frequency of food rations and dysfunctional tap stands were addressed to the appropriate Oxfam colleagues for follow-up. Other protection issues, such as the harassment of girls in a particular area of one camp, were directly referred to coordination bodies for follow-up.

Protection issues in the camps were shared with the advocacy team so that they could discuss developments in the camps at local, national and international levels. Finally, having information from both refugee and host communities was important not only to understand the different protection risks faced, but to shed light on the reasons behind the increasing tensions within the refugee communities, and between host and refugee communities. None of this would have been possible without the development of ongoing relationships with network members within the camps and host communities.