



The Border  
Consortium

# TBC

## STRATEGY 2020-2022



## INTRODUCTION

Since 1984, The Border Consortium (TBC) has been working with the displaced and conflict-affected people of south eastern Myanmar to address the humanitarian needs and protection concerns of people fleeing from fighting and to support rights-based approaches to peace and development.

Developed in consultation with TBC staff and partners, this document outlines the main challenges, ambitions and commitments of TBC moving forward, and presents four strategic directions that will guide our programming in Thailand and south eastern Myanmar over the next three years.

**Note on terminology:** In this document the term ‘displaced and conflict-affected communities’ is used to describe all communities with which TBC works. This includes the nearly 100,000 refugees residing in temporary shelters in Thailand; internally displaced communities in areas of potential return and/or areas still impacted by conflict in south eastern Myanmar.

## TBC STRATEGY 2020–2022

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### VISION:

TBC envisions a peaceful Burma/Myanmar where there is full respect for human rights, diversity is embraced, and communities can prosper.

### MISSION:

A TBC is an alliance of partners working together with displaced and conflict-affected people of south eastern Myanmar to address humanitarian needs and to support rights based and community driven approaches in pursuit of peace and development.



THE  
BORDER  
CONSORTIUM

## CORE VALUES

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Dignity  
and  
Respect

Partnership

Empowerment

Reliability

Justice  
and  
Equity

## STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

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1. Contribute to meeting the humanitarian needs of displaced communities, with a focus on women, children, older persons, and people with illness or disabilities.
2. Reinforce food security through improved nutrition and productive livelihoods.
3. Promote protective environments and safe and dignified futures for displaced and conflict-affected communities.
4. Reinforce accountability, partnership and local ownership to ensure responsible transitions.



## CONTEXT ANALYSIS

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TBC's 2017-19 Strategy responded to significant political developments in Myanmar, including a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) reached between the government of Myanmar and eight ethnic armed organisations (EAOS) in 2015<sup>1</sup>—as well as the election by popular vote of the National League for Democracy (NLD). These changes brought hopes of democratic reform, peace and economic liberalisation in Myanmar and of the possibility of voluntary repatriation and reintegration for nearly 100,000 refugees from camps in Thailand. Accordingly, the 2017-19 Strategy focused on supporting voluntary return and on consolidating services in the camps in Thailand, with a view to their eventual closure and the responsible exit of TBC.



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<sup>1</sup> Another two EAOs signed in 2018, including the New Mon State Party, but the Karenni National Progressive Party is not yet a signatory as of Nov 2019

Since 2017, however, national reform in Myanmar has faltered and the NLD has failed to uphold human rights or bring security to areas affected by armed conflict. In 2018-19, more than 730,000 Rohingya fled a military offensive in Rakhine state, leading to a humanitarian crisis. Armed conflicts between the military and ethnic armed groups have intensified in other parts of the country, and the peace process is in disarray. Large-scale voluntary return from Thailand has not occurred and the situation in south eastern Myanmar has become increasingly unstable. With fighting and skirmishes stoked by large-scale development projects and disputes over land and natural resources in the area expected to continue, there are doubts that the security of returnees can be assured. Further, there is no indication that other obstacles to a safe and dignified return, including mine clearance; land tenure; water and electricity; access to health care and education plus sustainable livelihoods, will be addressed in the near future.



Significantly, of the approximately 11,000 people who have returned to Myanmar since 2016, 10,000 opted not to return through the voluntary repatriation processes authorised bilaterally between the governments of Thailand and Myanmar. Many refugees have serious reservations about engaging with the bilateral repatriation process, and those people who choose to return through informal channels to areas of mixed control or non-state controlled areas require alternative support mechanisms to ensure their preparedness and successful reintegration. Return Protocols developed by refugee leadership deal specifically with

spontaneous returns and will be operationalised with TBC support through the 2020-22 Strategy. Meanwhile, TBC will continue to emphasise the right to return, and the corresponding responsibilities of the governments of Thailand and Myanmar for repatriation and reintegration. TBC will advocate with stakeholders and duty bearers for a development strategy that supports refugee reintegration and recognises the intersection of peace-building, the fulfilment of human rights and a sustainable economy. TBC will also continue support to conflict-affected communities in south eastern Myanmar, so they are prepared to welcome returnees.

While continuing to support refugee preparedness for repatriation and reintegration into Myanmar, TBC and its partners recognise that many refugees will not consider return under current conditions. For some groups of refugees, well-founded fear of persecution remains, so repatriation and reintegration into Myanmar may never be a desirable option. TBC must therefore continue exploring how to contribute to broadening options for refugee futures.



Thailand's continuing need for migrant workers, coupled with a shift in the government of Thailand's discourse around refugees, has opened up potential pathways to legal labour migration from camps into Thailand. The governments of Thailand and Myanmar are currently exploring a system of nationality pre-verification that would provide refugees with civil documentation, without them having to go to Myanmar. While this would represent a significant step towards strengthening self-reliance and providing alternative options to refugees, experience recommends caution: Even if the proposal comes to fruition, it does not offer a durable solution, is only for people of working-age, and does not guarantee protection. TBC must continue to advocate for the optimal options for all refugees, including the most vulnerable and marginalised.

Given the improbability of imminent large-scale return, and the time it might take for alternative pathways to materialise, TBC and its partners do not anticipate a major population reduction in the nine camps in Thailand over the next two to three years. Nor is it expected that camps will close in the near future, although partial closures, the consolidation of camps and the withdrawal of services cannot be ruled out, especially since further reductions in funding are possible. In this uncertain situation, TBC must work with partners and donors to continue ensuring basic humanitarian assistance and protection for people in camps. Preparing for future transitions with accountability to displaced communities, partners and donors must continue alongside daily support.

While TBC has strong donor support, funding levels until the end of 2022 are not guaranteed. As such TBC's capacity to ensure basic humanitarian assistance is not assured. Growing pressures on resources place additional burdens on refugee communities, in particular camp leaders and administrators. These extra pressures are linked to increasing community tensions and negative coping mechanisms, which in turn lead to a range of protection issues in camps.



A key issue for TBC and other duty-bearers is refugee mobility. As people explore their options outside the camps, they require freedom of movement. Growing financial insecurity has already forced families to seek ways to supplement their income through work outside the camps, putting them at risk of exploitation and arrest. As such, TBC must renew efforts to promote protective environments for displaced and conflict-affected communities, while also seeking to mitigate pressures on service provision and camp management. The strategy should above all remain flexible and responsive to changing scenarios in the camps in Thailand and in south eastern Myanmar in order to ensure that TBC programming adapts appropriately to the context and needs of displaced communities.



# TBC'S STRATEGIC PLAN FOR 2020–2022

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TBC envisions a future for the displaced and conflict-affected communities of south eastern Myanmar in which they no longer need the protection of camps, in which their fundamental rights are respected, and where they are empowered to determine their own futures. TBC's strategic plan for 2020–22 reflects our continuing commitment to this vision. Programmes in Thailand and Myanmar are designed to promote protective environments and sustainable, safe futures for the communities with which TBC works.

Recognising that camps are not a durable solution for refugees, TBC will continue to advocate for the safe, dignified and voluntary repatriation and reintegration of refugees to Myanmar. TBC will support refugees' informed decision-making and preparedness for their futures. This will include reinforcing the self-reliance and resilience of communities in south eastern Myanmar.

Additionally, TBC recognises the need to help people broaden their options for the future. Our strategy for 2020–22 places a focus on amplifying the voices of refugees through advocacy to find alternative pathways for refugees, such as temporary labour migration into Thailand.

TBC recommits to its leadership role in upholding the rights of displaced and conflict-affected communities. TBC will strive to meet the basic needs of refugees in Thailand for as long as needed.

At the same time, the strategy looks towards and prepares for a future when TBC's services will no longer be needed, or no longer be feasible, by continuing to build local capacity and promote local ownership, accountability and responsible transitions.

## COMPLEMENTARY PROGRAMMING IN THAILAND AND MYANMAR.

Unless otherwise specified, objectives in the four strategic directions apply to TBC programmes in both Thailand and Myanmar. The focus of activities is largely humanitarian in Thailand, complemented by support for recovery of communities in areas of potential return to better support refugee reintegration in Myanmar.

# COMMITMENTS

## UNDERPINNING THE STRATEGY

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TBC is committed to international standards for humanitarian action and refugee protection. The rights of individuals and communities are the foundation for programme design, implementation and advocacy. These commitments underpin all TBC work and they reflect TBC values of dignity and respect, partnership, empowerment, justice and equity, and reliability.

- **Rights-based approach** Recognising that all human beings have inherent value and dignity, TBC commits to upholding the rights, needs and interests of the displaced and conflict affected people of south eastern Myanmar as the guiding principle for policies, decisions and programmes.
- **State responsibility** TBC works with national and local authorities, civil society and the international humanitarian and development community so that the fundamental rights of displaced and conflict affected people are respected, protected and promoted.
- **Equity and Inclusion** Emphasising the importance of non-discrimination for social cohesion, TBC pays particular attention to those who are potentially marginalized such as women, children, older persons, ethnic or religious minorities, and people with illness or disabilities.
- **Community empowerment and partnership** TBC upholds dignity and respect towards community partners and the people with whom we work by listening to and acting on their ideas and suggestions, and by working closely with and supporting community leaders, and promoting community ownership.
- **Accountability** TBC and implementing partners ensure accountability, transparency and responsiveness to communities as well as national governments, local authorities, donors and Consortium members.
- **Environmental awareness** TBC promotes equitable and sustainable natural resource management and strives to strengthen resilience to climate change. We are committed to minimising any negative impact that TBC's activities have on the environment.
- **Do no harm** In seeking to provide assistance, protection and solutions for the displaced and conflict-affected people of south eastern Myanmar, TBC takes appropriate measures to minimize the risk of inflaming conflict or harming those it is trying to assist.

# STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

## 1 Contribute to meeting the humanitarian needs of displaced communities, with a focus on women, children, older persons, and people with illness or disabilities

TBC fulfils its core mandate of providing equitable humanitarian assistance to displaced communities in the form of food, cooking fuel and shelter.

1.1 Evidence based innovation that improves equitable access to adequate nutritious food, cooking fuel and shelter is facilitated for refugees in the camps in Thailand.

1.2 The camps' market-based food card system is monitored and regulated to ensure people's access to diverse, nutritious, quality food at fair prices.

1.3 Housing materials in the camps are efficiently managed and houses dismantled when no longer needed.

1.4 Civil society organisations in areas of return in south eastern Myanmar have the capacity and resources to support initial reintegration of groups of spontaneous returnees.

1.5 Civil society preparedness for manmade or natural disasters is strengthened through targeted disaster risk reduction (DRR) initiatives.

1.6 Displaced and conflict-affected communities in south eastern Myanmar, and in camps in Thailand, can access emergency assistance in response to manmade and natural disasters.



## 2 Reinforce food security through improved nutrition and productive livelihoods

Displaced and conflict-affected communities benefit from the adoption of improved nutrition, environmental hygiene, agricultural and small business practices.

2.1 Healthy maternal, infant and young child feeding (IYCF) practices are adopted and sustained within displaced and conflict affected communities, with an emphasis on the first 1000 days of life.

2.2 Monitoring and surveillance of the nutritional status of displaced and conflict affected communities is conducted, with a focus on children under 5 years of age.

2.3 Increased adoption of climate smart and nutrition-sensitive agricultural practices improves productivity, income and food security.

2.4 Support to entrepreneurial development and women's economic empowerment strengthens their market engagement.

2.5 Access to secure land tenure, farming equipment, and irrigation systems strengthens agricultural productivity in south eastern Myanmar.

2.6 Household access to safe water and environmental hygiene is enhanced in south eastern Myanmar.

2.7 Equitable and sustainable natural resource management practices are promoted in south eastern Myanmar.



## 3

## Promote protective environments and safe and dignified futures for displaced and conflict-affected communities.

Human rights, including the right to seek asylum and not be forcibly returned to Myanmar, are promoted. The right to voluntary return for refugees is promoted alongside alternative solutions.

3.1 Community leaders and civil society organisations foster protective and gender sensitive environments by practicing the principles of social inclusion, equity and accountable leadership.

3.2 Humanitarian assistance and protection is provided to new arrivals in camps in Thailand fleeing conflict or persecution.

3.3 Community-based protection is promoted through the documentation of violence and abuse and advocacy to promote human rights.

3.4 Displaced communities and civil society organisations are engaged in planning and preparedness for refugee lives beyond the camps, enabling refugees to make better informed decisions about their futures.

3.5 Agreed protocols to broaden support for refugee return provide a framework for monitoring and addressing the rights and needs of spontaneous returnees.

3.6 Relationships and networks between displaced communities in Thailand and local authorities and communities in areas of potential return in south eastern Myanmar are strengthened.

3.7 Evidence-based advocacy on protracted displacement and chronic vulnerability increases awareness about the need for holistic local responses to the multi-faceted challenges faced by displaced and conflict-affected communities.

3.8 Social protection in south eastern Myanmar is reinforced through community rice banks, early childhood development initiatives and support for survivors of sexual and gender based violence.



## 4 Reinforce accountability, partnership and local ownership to ensure responsible transitions

TBC responsibly and transparently manages change in collaboration with local partners, donors and other stakeholders.

4.1 TBC's structure and programming adapts responsibly to changes in context, needs and concerns of displaced and conflict-affected communities.

4.2 Consultation, communication and information sharing with partners, including host and displaced communities, informs and enhances their participation in TBC programming and transition planning.

4.3 Localisation and community ownership are promoted through strengthened leadership and organisational capacities of partners and civil society organisations.

4.4 Feedback mechanisms encourage participation and help ensure TBC and partner accountability to communities.

4.5 Strengthened TBC and partner quality assurance through monitoring and evaluation systems, enables accountability to communities, donors and other stakeholder.



## MANAGING RISKS

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TBC's risk management strategy recognises the dynamic environments in which TBC and its partners operate in Thailand and in south eastern Myanmar. Moving forward into the strategic period for 2020-22, the future is difficult to predict. Potential risks include, but are not limited to: reduced donor engagement and financial support for TBC activities; changed political positions of the governments of Myanmar or Thailand; a stalling peace process and increased militarisation in south eastern Myanmar; and increasing pressures on camp populations linked to reductions in services and assistance. TBC has mitigation strategies and contingency plans in place to respond to these risks if and when they materialise. TBC and its partners will adapt to changing conditions. This may require negotiation when considering donor and other stakeholder expectations and requirements.

TBC will monitor risks continuously in order to adjust implementation plans in the camps and in south eastern Myanmar as needed. TBC members and leadership, alongside refugees and displaced persons, will continue to advocate with governments, donors and other stakeholders to ensure funding to maintain an acceptable level of services in the camps. Given the now acute risk that returns will not proceed as hoped, in the 2020-22 strategic period TBC will more assertively help refugees identify alternate paths to safe and dignified lives outside their camps.

## FINANCING THE STRATEGY

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TBC advocates for joint responsibility among international partners and donors to share the burden of protracted displacement with the government of Thailand. In Thailand there is an expectation that TBC will have donor support to meet essential humanitarian needs as long as there are refugees remaining in the camps. In Myanmar, TBC will only embark on programmes that secure designated funding. Three key external factors determine TBC's Budget and expenses, namely the price of commodities, the rate of departures from the camps, and foreign exchange rates. Through localisation and community led programming, TBC seeks to minimize organisational costs whilst recognising that community organisations also need access to core funding. TBC has set aside funds to cover severance costs of all staff and close out of the organisation after all operations have ceased, whenever that may be.



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