

Climate Change Related Migration in Bangladesh

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Staggering scale of climate-related migration in Bangladesh

The Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU) of the University of Dhaka and the Sussex Centre for Migration Research (SCMR) of the University of Sussex have recently completed a research on climate change related migration in Bangladesh. The research was supported by the Climate and Development Knowledge Network (CDKN).

The research has illustrated that while migration in Bangladesh is sensitive to climate stresses and shocks it arises from a complex combination of economic, social, demographic and political factors. Through the analysis of upazila level data of population growth from 2001-2011, our research has estimated that over the next 40 years approximately 9.7 million people in Bangladesh are likely to migrate in the long term from the areas affected by the climate stresses of inland flooding, storm surges and riverbank erosion. Most of these migrants will move for economic reasons, created to a great extent by climatic hazards, but up to one million may migrate in part due to climate change itself. Additionally, shorter term and circular migration is expected to be even larger than these figures.

While acknowledging that climatic stresses will increase migration, this research concludes that instead of looking at migration as a threat, it can be transformed into an effective adaptation tool. This policy brief identifies major areas where policy changes are required to reduce the risks associated with migration and enhance the developmental outcome of migration on the affected people.

Ministry of Environment and Forests, Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Labour and Employment (MOLE), Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment (MOEWOE), Planning Commission, National Environmental Committee, National Steering Committee on Climate Change, Climate Change Unit, Climate Change focal points in all of these ministries, departments and agencies are our target audience for the policy reforms that we are suggesting in this briefing.

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Changing mindset: Transform threats into tools for adaptation

In the context of Bangladesh, it was found that almost all the adaptation programmes implemented by different ministries, NGOs and development partners concentrate on local level interventions. These include cyclone shelters, cyclone resistant housing, equipment to bring in or flash out saline water, construction of polders, drought and saline resistant crop production, floating gardens, non-farm agricultural production, trainings for handicrafts production etc. All these interventions are important. Nonetheless, practitioners usually perceive migration as failure of their local level programmes. As this research highlights that along with local level adaptation, migration of few members of the household increases the opportunity of affected people to adapt with climatic and other stresses, therefore, the traditional views that perceive migration as a problem needs to be replaced. Findings of our research can contribute in changing such perception.

Our research found that climate vulnerable communities in Chapai Nawabganj, Sathkhira and Munshiganj use short-term and circular internal migration to cope with climate change and variability. A section of them migrate short distances to nearby towns. Members of some other families migrate to major metropolitan cities of Dhaka and Chittagong. Most of them find jobs as rickshaw pullers and in informal sectors such as brick kilns and construction or are self-employed in urban and peri-urban areas. Major rural to rural migration takes place during sowing and harvest seasons.

With improvements in roads and other transportation networks, internal migration has become affordable to a large number of vulnerable households. Step migration and social networks help such mobility. A section of vulnerable families send one or a few members of their households to other areas while rest of the family remains in the origin area. They combine the benefits of rural and urban areas – urban areas providing income and rural areas providing free education, low cost health and

sanitation facilities and other benefit from social safety net. Thus, they better prepare themselves to adapt to multiple climate change and livelihoods stresses.



Migrants bringing in-kind wage from Gopalganj to their origin village in Sathkhira after taking part in harvesting. Photo courtesy: Arjun Pandey.

Suggestions for Policy Reorientation & Reforms

Our research reviewed four types of policies¹ and found that linkage between migration and climate change has not been adequately addressed in the existing policy documents of Bangladesh that deal with climate change. Based on these omissions we present the following suggestions.

Incorporation of migration as one of the adaptation strategies:

Migration in general should not be seen as a threat. Voluntary labour migration both internal and international has the potential to improve resilience of climate vulnerable communities and it should be recognised as one of many adaptation strategies to climate change. The mindset of equating internal migration with crime or looking at the migrants as welfare targets has to be changed.

Framing of Climate Change Policy:

Bangladesh has an environmental policy, but does not yet have a comprehensive climate change policy. The GoB should frame a comprehensive climate

¹(i) Policies on climate change, (ii) Development and poverty reduction policies, (iii) Disaster management policies, (iv) Migration policies

change policy targeting climate-resilient development. The policy should duly appreciate the role of voluntary migration in the context of climate adaptation and adequately address the hardship of displaced population. Land reform measures are required to establish the rightful claims of the displaced in government Khas land and diluvion land.

Framing of Internal Migration Policy:

A comprehensive policy needs to be developed to protect the rights of internal migrants. Wage and work conditions of the construction, garment, and brick kiln workers, minimum age of domestic workers, reduction of scope of exploitation and abuse - all should be part of internal migration policy.

Recognition of Brick Kilns and Domestic Work as Formal Sector:

The Ministry of Labour and Employment has drafted a labour law. The labour law does not recognise brick kilns and domestic work as formal employment. This is an important gap, since many internal migrants from climate-stressed areas work in these sectors. In order to ensure labour rights, all these types of work should be recognised as formal sector employment.

Incorporation of climate change issue in the overseas employment policy, 2006:

Overseas employment policy (2006) is currently being reviewed. The review should suggest ways and methods to ensure access of people from climate stressed areas to short-term international contract migration, since this holds out better prospects for building climate resilience.

Inclusion of MOLE and MOEWOE in different CC committees:

Representation from MOLE and MOEWOE should be ensured in climate change committees, including

the Inter-ministerial Climate Change Steering Committee, the Climate Change Technical Committee of the Climate Change Trust Fund (CCTF), National Environment Committee, National Committee on Climate Change and Climate Change Unit. A climate change focal point should be established in MOLE and MOEWOE.

Expansion of TTC in climate affected areas :

Scrutiny of local level adaptation programme shows that skills imparted to vulnerable households mostly concentrate on production of handicrafts and tailoring. Skills that would result in increasing income substantially are hardly provided. Besides, skills imparted do not meet the needs of the market. The Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET), Youth and Education Ministries also run different vocational training programmes but their presence is minimal in climate affected areas. Services of these Technical Training Centres (TTCs) should be expanded to affected areas.

Access to International Short-term Contract Labour Market:

The MOEWOE manages short-term contract migration processing work through its line agency, the BMET and District Manpower Offices (DEMOs). These organisations conduct online registration of potential migrants, disseminate information on labour market, attest applications of recruitments etc. BMET activities and DEMO offices should be established in the climate affected areas.

Access to Migration Finance:

International short-term labour migration requires access to substantive financial resources. In 2011, the GoB established Prabashi Kallyan Bank (Expatriates' Welfare Bank) to provide migration finance loans to poor potential migrants. To ensure access, branches of this bank should be established in climate affected areas. Resources can be allocated from the CCTF to this Bank.

Development of remittance backed financial products: The GoB can also allocate matching grants for remittance receiving households to develop projects that would create employment at local level. The GoB can set up remittance bonds for climate stressed areas that can be used to provide the reserves for micro-insurance schemes that local communities can purchase. Remittance bonds could also be used to fund other social safety net programmes.

About the climate related migration in Bangladesh project

'Climate related migration in Bangladesh' is a project of the Sussex Centre for Migration Research, University of Sussex and Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit, University of Dhaka, funded by the CDKN. It aims to understand, plan for and respond to climate-induced migration. It seeks to reduce people's vulnerability and build resilience. The project produces qualitative and quantitative evidence on climate change and migration in Bangladesh, identify policy gaps and make recommendations to minimise the costs and risks associated with such migration and

maximise its contribution as an adaptive measure. The Government of Bangladesh is a key stakeholder in it. This briefing paper was written by Tasneem Siddiqui, Mohammad Towheedul Islam, Dominic Kniveton, Richard Black and Maxmillan Martin. The references used in this paper are available in RMMRU-SCMR working paper series on climate change and migration. For more information please contact: d.r.kniveton@sussex.ac.uk, tsiddiqui59@gmail.com.

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