

Safe and Sustainable Cities migration, security and wellbeing

Key Messages

- By 2050 more people of Bangladesh will be living in urban areas than rural areas. Therefore, instead of viewing migrants as source of urban problems, long term planning is required to create sustainable cities for all.
- Learning from lived experiences of new migrants can lead to more effective and sustainable solutions.
- Migrants of Chattogram are not a homogenous group and experience a host of different social, economic and environmental risks, depending on their gender, ethnicity and places of residence and work in the city. Therefore, interests of all groups need to be accommodated in planning.
- The efforts of different local city authorities and planners to provide services are often hampered due to limited coordination and communication. To overcome this, policy coherence and a system of coordination have to be developed.



This brief is prepared for planning and policy stakeholders in Bangladesh and provides an overview of findings of 18 months of research conducted by the University of Exeter, UK, and RMMRU, Bangladesh. The research investigates the risks that impact the security and wellbeing of migrant populations in Chattogram, following rapid urbanization.

Background

Based on an analysis of the population census of Bangladesh of 2001 and 2011, a RMMRU and SCMR study (2013) estimates that from 2011 to 2050 as many as 16 to 26 million people will move from their places of origin in Bangladesh due to a number of climatic hazards. These movements will pre-dominantly consist of internal displacement and labour migration mostly from rural to urban areas. Migration decisions are multi-causal. Nonetheless, the research finds environment/climate change as one of the five important influencing factors behind rural-urban migration. DECCMA household survey 2016 on Bangladesh shows that a section of people of climate affected areas are using rural to urban migration of one or a few members of the household and their remittances as one of the successful *in situ* adaptation tools of left behind households. They are engaging in migration along with taking other measures of local level adaptation. Given that rural-urban migration of a section of population is a reality in the context of climate change or for other reasons, in recent time, at the global level the climate change adaptation discourse is looking more and more into the situation of new migrants in urban areas. This focus emanates from the idea

that benefits of sustainable development should be experienced by all. In Bangladesh given the nature of urbanization, scarcity of urban facilities such as housing, educational opportunities, water, sanitation, healthcare, connectivity etc. accommodating new migrants in urban areas is a serious challenge.

In 2018 the University of Exeter and RMMRU initiated a research to understand the challenges of new migrants in the urban areas of Bangladesh. Keeping in mind that major government efforts of local level adaptation will continue, yet a section of people will move to urban areas due to both push and pull factors. This research explores ways to accommodate the human security needs of new migrants in line with attaining SDG 11 of safe and sustainable cities. Chattogram is one of the two megacities of Bangladesh. This city has been chosen to conduct the empirical research. The research engages with new urban populations, representing both Bengali community of plainland and ethnic communities of CHT, and city planners of Chattogram through a range of interventions (survey, photo elicitation and workshops) over 18 months. It unpacked the challenges that migrants and planners face in sustainably accommodating security, integration and wellbeing of new migrants and also showcases solutions offered by them.

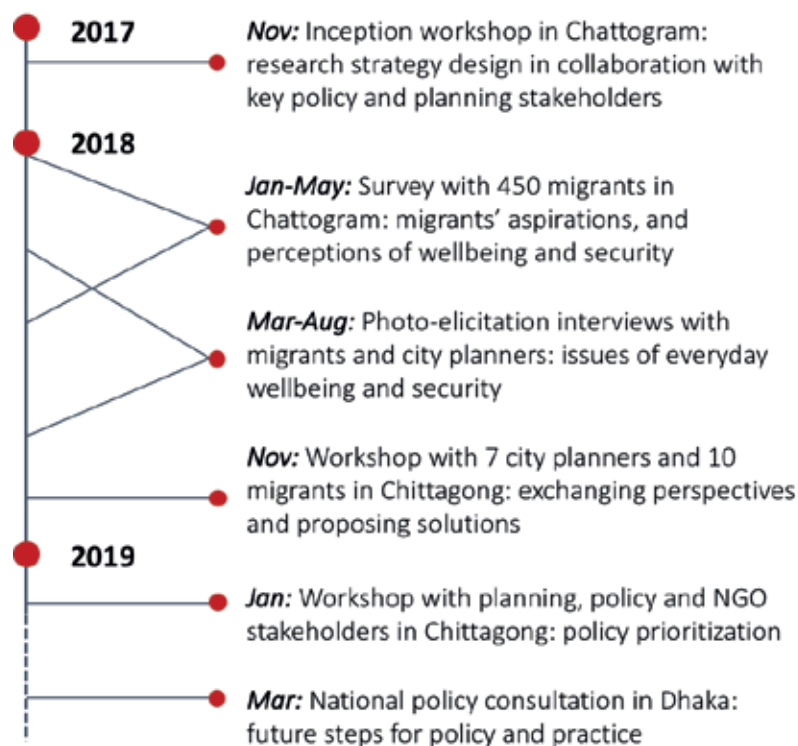


Figure 1. Key Project Activities



State of Urbanization

In the context of climate change in Bangladesh, rural-urban migration is viewed in the mainstream literature as a threat. However, with or without climate change effects since its independence in 1971, Bangladesh has been experiencing rapid urbanization. The country, once dominated by a rural-agrarian society, has been experiencing a vast and rapid increase in urban population between 1961 and 2011, from 2.6 million to about 43.43 million. It is projected that by 2030, 44 percent of the population will be living in cities¹. Trends of urban growth in Bangladesh are not driven by growth of natural population rather it is largely driven by intensified rural-urban migration.

Situating migration in urban planning and climate change policies

The reality that by 2050 more Bangladeshis will be living in urban areas compared to rural areas throws a unique set of challenges for planners and policy makers. They have to decide the path of how to make the cities safe and sustainable. A review of existing policies and action plans shows that while some recent urban policies of Bangladesh are more open to migration relative to earlier years (e.g. National Housing Authority Act 2000; National Urbanization Policy 2014), others continue to view rural-urban migration as a problem of development and treat it as the cause of widespread urban poverty (e.g. National Adaptation Action Plan 2009). For instance, the Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan 2009 or the Disaster Management Act 2012, still treat rural-urban labour migration as failure to adapt locally and advocate for investment only in *in-situ* adaptation. So far, little attention has been paid to understand adaptation experiences of new migrants in urban receiving areas. More generally, these policies only take into account the push factors operational in origin areas and overlook the pull factors and incentives that draw people to cities. Important pull factors that encourages rural population to migrate to two megacities of Bangladesh is the concentration of economic activities and administrative decision making in these cities. The solutions derived from the push factors operational in the origin areas mostly focuses on creation of employment in rural areas and discourage movement from rural to urban

areas. Some policies even attempt to relocate migrants back to their origin areas (e.g. National Housing Policy 2016). Such policies however, remain ineffective as they can hardly stem the rural-urban migration flow nor can they contribute to development of safe and sustainable cities for all.

Security and wellbeing of new migrants in Chattogram city

Chattogram is the second largest city of Bangladesh and is an important business centre of the country. Employment opportunities attract new migrants to this megacity as it hosts a port, garments other manufacturing industries and export processing zones (EPZ). While migration is pursued by some as a pathway out of poverty or to ensure upward economic mobility, low-income migrants are concentrated in impoverished slums in low-lying and hilly areas of Chattogram. They are exposed to environmental hazards, face low access to urban services and endure sub-standard work conditions. This section of the policy brief describes how the new migrants and the city planners and policy makers perceive the challenges of new migrants in Chattogram city. The perception of new migrants are presented first. This will be followed by perceptions of city planners and policy makers.



“If we complain to the owner to elevate the homestead, he does not listen. His answer is: ‘with existing situation if you wish you can stay, if not, you can leave.’ But we cannot help living here. We do not have the ability to move.” (New Migrant)

Perception of new migrants

Migrants’ experience of wellbeing and human security in Chattogram city reveals a divergent trajectory between positive and negative outcomes. On one hand, they show high level of happiness,

¹Data source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics

and, on the other hand, endure anxiety, worry, and hopelessness/depression. Some are insecure in respect to food, housing, income and/or health. Migrants are not a homogenous group. Therefore, their exposure to a variety of social, economic and environmental risks differ on the basis of their geographic location, sex and ethnicity.

Migrants living in unauthorised settlements in hilly areas are additionally worried about landslides during the monsoon season, as well as the risk of eviction by government officials or landowners. The precarity of livelihood of a section of migrants in the city preclude them from staying elsewhere

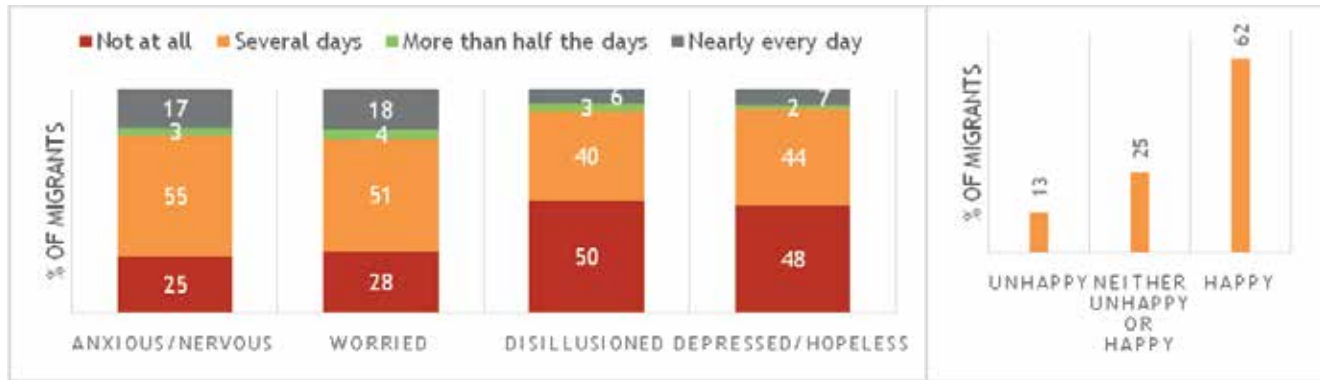


Figure 2. Migrants' subjective wellbeing

Common experiences of insecurity: The new internal migrants who moved to different parts of Chattogram city both from plains and hill districts identified a number of challenges: inadequate and inhumane housing conditions, lack of access to safe drinking water and sanitation. The fragility of livelihoods and income is an overarching threat, which defines the experiences of all migrants, whether male or female, plain or hill people. More importantly, all groups of migrants feel invisible and powerless and unable to make their voices heard to the authorities.

Variation based on geographic locations:

Migrants residing in established slums in low-lying areas of Chattogram face water logging and low quality of civic services such as safe drinking water, cooking gas and sanitation facilities.



“Migrants’ dwelling in hill slopes are quite risky (city planner)”

and expose them to exploitation of mafia groups often connected with political forces who exercise unauthorized control over government land.

Variation based on gender: Lack of privacy while bathing, long queues for using toilets, incidents of sexual harrassments are top concerns of female migrants as well female members of migrant households. Men working in formal sector including factories experience fluctuating income. Long working hours is a major concern of female garment workers. Women working in plastic factories have to keep standing the whole time with very little breaks in EPZs. Migrant women, particularly working in formal sector, complain about lack of child care facilities. They feel that they have compromised health and safety of their children for work.

Variation based on jobs: Based on the type of job performed the challenges of urban living vary. In order to make a living migrants working as street hawkers experience police harassment, demands for bribes and frequent eviction from roadside and footpaths. Those who work in waste collection suffer from skin disease and breathing problem.

Variation based on ethnicity: There is a distinct difference between migrants from the hills and the plainland. For plainland migrants religious and spiritual places are available in new surroundings. Whereas hill people face difficulty in having places of congregation that they require in urban setting



for spiritual and community well being. The hill community faced this challenge by creating a place of congregation with the support of the city Mayor. Education of children is important to both hill and plainland communities. Impact of waterlogging on children attending schools, lack of open space and playground are mentioned by both groups. However, supply of electricity during study hours and quality of education were issues of concern particularly mentioned by the hill community. The need for institutions for skills training, such as English language and computing, have been prioritised by the hill women.

Perceptions of city planners and policymakers

City planners focused more into challenges of infrastructure, waste management, traffic management and road congestion, unauthorized occupation of public spaces including footpaths by hawkers, lack of open space and amenities for the youth, unplanned urbanization, turning hills into plains, waterlogging, risky dwelling of new migrants in hill slopes and increased incidence of crime such as drug abuse and trafficking in urban slum areas.

Planners and policy makers acknowledge the shortfalls in the current provision of essential amenities and services in slum areas. However, they also thought that some of the government programmes such as Chattogram City Corporation's waste management programme have not achieved their desired goals as slum dwellers do not abide by certain civic norms.



“The children...are growing up without the guidance of their parents. Their parents go out for work early in the morning and come back at dusk. In this time, they roam here and there. They don't go to school as their parents earn very little, which is not enough for spending on education.” (Migrant)

There is a convergence of opinion among new migrants and planners on some important issues. Both groups feel, social amenities in slums are few and lack of community space place children and youth at risk of involvement in antisocial activities. They also agree that children should not be involved in hazardous work. Both highlight that places for socialization should be created not only for children and youth but also for persons of all ages. Both acknowledge that urban planning process should be inclusive of new migrants who are essential service providers of the city as well as providers of labour to the industries.

Lessons learnt

- Low cost housing, closed to work place of service providers and industrial workers, should be integral part of planning of sustainable cities.
- Hawkers are essential part of city life. Spaces for hawkers' market in strategic locations should be planned.
- Spaces are to be created for low income groups and should include to accommodate places for community activities such as playground, libraries and clubs.
- Ensure new migrants' access to education and training.
- Rented housing for low income groups can be facilitated by establishing structures that will accommodate market and community places in the lower floors and housing in the higher floors.
- Mass rapid transport facilities such as low cost commuter train services may be established to reduce congestion and pressure on the city roads.
- Using water bodies for facilitating commute as well as for housing, educational and community spaces may be considered.
- Ensure ILO 'decent work' standard in formal and informal sectors.
- Improve communication and coordination between different public sector authorities and city council in delivering services in the city.

Towards safe and sustainable cities in Bangladesh

The issues identified through photo-elicitation, and the constraints and opportunities discussed by policy makers and planners of Chattogram are not only important for the wellbeing of migrants, but also have broader relevance and significant implications for long-term sustainable development in Bangladesh. Conscious steps will be required to make Bangladeshi cities more inclusive, safe and resilient in times of rapid urbanization, including:

- shifting mindsets of existing prejudice about migrants, as threats to urban sustainability, in policy and planning circles;
- integrating the lived experiences and views of low-income migrants into planning processes, including the design of interventions to solve existing challenges;

- ensuring access of low income new migrants to improved and equitable housing, civic facilities, decent and secure employment, education and safe social amenities; and
- improving communication between different authorities at different scales for efficiency in delivering effective and legitimate solutions to existing and future urban challenges.

Acknowledgement

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