

## Migration and its climate sensitivity

*Bangladesh has a long history of migration within the country and beyond. As our earlier Briefing Paper no.1, 'Making migration decisions amid climate change in Bangladesh', described, the link between climate change and migration is often not explicitly recognised by those moving. In part this is due to the complexity and multi-causality of the migration process. Based on the same CDKN-funded research, this paper traces current major migration patterns in the country, identifying their drivers and the sensitivity of these to climate change and variability. Overall, migration is largely driven by livelihood needs and an aspiration for improving the quality of life. Amid changes in climate and environment, it is likely that more people will migrate more often and contribute to better income and resilience at home and their destinations.*



**Fishermen at Cox's Bazar, a migrant destination prone to floods and storms.** Photo:Tahmid Munaz

Foresight Report (2011) conceptualised migration as being driven or determined by the multi-scale and overlapping influences of social, economic, demographic, environmental and political factors [1]. Black et al (2011) argue that assessment of future climate-related migration should start by taking into account existing movements of people in a given region [2]. This paper tries to identify migration flows in Bangladesh that are sensitive to climate change and variability.

Historically migration flows from Bangladesh can be categorised under four broad categories; internal, cross-border, short-term contract international and long-term permanent settlement in western countries. Internally migration streams include movements from rural to rural, and rural to peri-urban/urban and to metropolitan cities. Along with change of residence, seasonal circular migration during harvest and sowing seasons is a major form of rural to rural migration. According to Afsar, rural to urban movement is the most prevalent form of migration in Bangladesh, making up two-thirds of total flows [3]. She has identified a decline in the farming income of village households from 59 to 44 per cent between 1987 and 2000 as a contributory factor to increased rural-urban migration. Since then the rural economy has changed, impacting migration outcomes. For example, many villages of Bangladesh are undergoing a growth in fish and chicken hatcheries, maize and vegetable production, with these areas sometimes experiencing an economic rebirth. Increased flow of short-term international contract labour has also resulted in increased income of rural families. This means that determinants of rural to urban migration are changing .

## Internal migration and displacement

## International migration – short-term and long-term

RMMIRU

Migrants in urban centres find jobs both in formal and informal sectors. More than 2.8 million people work in the garments sector alone, 80 per cent of whom are young women. Brick-kiln, leather processing, jute, re-rolling mills and other manufacturing industries also draw internal migrants into the formal sector [4]. The majority of migrants find jobs in the informal economy as casual labourers, street vendors, rickshaw-pullers, or as domestic workers. For example, as early as in 2005, about 500,000 rickshaw pullers were working in Dhaka city [5]. Social networks of migrants based around kinship and neighbourhood ties as well as informal intermediaries support new migration. Therefore, a large segment of economic determinants of migration for many migrants of climate-affected areas are created by environmental drivers.

CDKN

SCMR

People are forced to move during extreme weather events, disasters and other ecological changes. An estimated 50 million people are exposed to or affected by disasters every five years, with the coasts facing a severe cyclone every three years on average, and a quarter of the country getting inundated during the yearly monsoon rains [6]. Displacement after disasters often involves short distances [7], but big numbers of people. For example, the 1998 floods inundated 69% of the land area damaging 2.6 million houses. The 2007 Cyclone Sidr destroyed 537,775 houses [8].

RMMIRU

Apart from the floods that they cause, the Himalayan rivers are also known for the giant loads of silt they wash down to Bangladesh. The dynamic river flow patterns lead to the formation of new stretches of riverbanks and islands called *chars* and erosion and submergence of existing ones. Hotspots include Sirajganj, Chapai Nawabganj and Munshiganj districts. About 2,000 to 3,000 kilometres of riverbanks face erosion annually, making 4.3 million people who live in the chars vulnerable. Annually this process reshapes about 9,000 hectares (ha) of mainland and 5,000 ha of *char* and renders 60,000 people landless. Two-thirds of the inhabitants of the Jamuna-Brahmaputra floodplain have experienced such displacement at least once, about 17 per cent thrice and 15 per cent 10 times [9]. Erosion does not necessarily mean loss of ownership of land. However, due to corruption, locally influential people often grab newly accreted land, resulting in forced migration of rightful owners. One may therefore surmise that in such situations migration often becomes inevitable.

CDKN

SCMR

Short-term international migration plays a major role in the socio-economic development of Bangladesh. In 2012, migrants remitted US\$14.17 billion, which is 44 per cent of the total remittances received by the 48 least developed countries [10]. The volume of remittances was six times higher than the overseas development aid to the country and twelve times more than Foreign Direct Investment [11].

According to Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET), from 1976 to 2012, almost 8.3 million Bangladeshis have gone abroad as short-term migrants. Since 2010 around 500,000 to 600,000 people are migrating each year. Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, Malaysia, Korea and Singapore are some of the major destinations. However there is no data on returnees.

Bangladeshi migrants are mostly men. After the lifting of restriction in 2006, female migrants constitute 6-7% of the total flow. Women mostly migrate to Lebanon, Jordan and UAE as domestic and manufacturing workers. The bulk of the Bangladeshi migrants, both men and women, are involved in low and semi-skilled jobs. BMET data inform us that it is only recently that people of a few climate-stressed areas have started to migrate internationally. Though the causality between climate stress and short-term international migration has not been studied yet, correlation can be seen in the timeframe of climatic stress and beginning of international labour mobility from some of these areas.

Migration from Bangladesh to the developed countries of the West was intimately connected to the British colonialism. People from Sylhet, Noakhali and Chittagong found jobs in British merchant ships. Some jumped ship in various ports including London, Liverpool and Bristol. In the 1950s to meet the demand for its growing textile industry, the UK opened its immigration door.

Later a large number of people from the Sylhet region migrated to the UK through the social network of early settlers. Now people of Bangladeshi origin can be found in many developed countries. An estimate based on information provided by the Bangladesh missions informs that in 2004 there were 1.5 million people living in the developed countries. Drivers of permanent migration to international destinations are diverse; however, recent environmental events do not have a significant role in that.

## Cross-border migration

Bangladesh and India share 4,096 km of land border. Cross-border mobility predates these countries' existence as nation states. It is understood that people from both sides move across the border due to historical links and social network of kinship, marriage, religious affinity and also for livelihood opportunities. Migration of landed aristocracy from different parts of East Bengal (that later became East Pakistan and then Bangladesh) to Calcutta in West Bengal, movement of plantation workers from Uttar Pradesh to Sylhet, workers from Orissa and South India to the urban municipalities of East Bengal, agricultural workers from greater Mymensingh and Sylhet to Assam and railway workers from Maharashtra and Bihar to different parts of East Bengal, are some major internal movements that took place during the British period.

The partition of British India in 1947 was accompanied by large-scale movement of Hindus and Sikhs to India and Muslims to the newly created East and West Pakistan. The formal and informal flows of migration between Bangladesh and India continued after 1971, when Bangladesh became an independent nation. Settlement migration of a section of Hindu community and migration of relatively poor and less educated Muslims from bordering areas for work are the two major streams. Migration from India to Bangladesh takes place through marriage and during agricultural seasons; relatively recently professionals are obtaining skilled jobs in the manufacturing and service sectors. Climate stresses may induce migration from the bordering areas through previously existing networks of migration. Swain (1996) has drawn correlation between the construction of Farakka Barrage and migration from surrounding areas [12].

In recent years, tighter border control measures by India have made irregular migration, particularly of Muslims from Bangladesh, difficult. Nonetheless, many Hindus may choose to migrate to West Bengal if livelihood and integration opportunities there turn out to be better than migration to urban areas of Bangladesh.

## Conclusions and recommendations

The above discussion on migration flows within and from Bangladesh show that, not all types of migrations are equally sensitive to climate change. Migration for permanent settlement is weakly sensitive to climate change.

Short-term international contract migration mostly takes place from certain pockets of Bangladesh that are less sensitive to climate change. Of late, however, informal recruiters have begun hiring from a few of climate vulnerable areas. The cost of such migration deters the poorer people of climate change-affected areas to take advantage of international migration. Some bordering areas of Bangladesh could be sensitive to cross-border population movement. However, securitisation of population movements between India and Bangladesh has reduced the scope of such movement to a great extent. Displacement and short-term internal migration are the most sensitive flows to climate change and variability. Amid unpredictable but definite changes in climate and environment, it is likely that more people will migrate for longer periods to earn and contribute to better standards of living and resilience at their home and destination.



**A Dhaka street vendor. Short-term migration is often sensitive to climate variability.** *Photo: Steve Evans*

If supported properly, migration can form a beneficial adaptation strategy. In the scenario of a changing climate, poor people who move in search of jobs to new places often risk low wages, insecure working environments and inadequate housing, services and infrastructure. The economic contribution of temporary migrant workforce is often not adequately acknowledged. While such systemic inadequacies make their livelihoods insecure, the migrants could also face exploitative practices at work, at their living environment and while accessing services. Government policies should be directed to addressing these challenges, taking into account the vulnerabilities, strengths and above all, the rights of the migrants, as well as considering the vulnerabilities of those left behind, unable or unwilling to move.

## References

1. Foresight (2011) Migration and Global Environmental Change, Final Project Report, London: Government Office for Science
2. Black, R., Adger, W. N. Arnell, N. W., Dercon, S., Geddes, A. and Thomas, D. S.G.. (2011) The effect of Environmental Change on Human Migration, Global Environmental Change, 21S, pS3-S11.
- 3 - 4. Afsar, R. (2003) Internal migration and the development nexus: the case of Bangladesh, paper presented at the Regional Conference on Migration, Development and Pro-Poor Policy Choices in Asia, Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit and DfID, UK, Dhaka, Bangladesh 22–24 June.
5. Kreibich, V. (2012) Book Review of Siddiqui, K. et al (2010) Social Formation in Dhaka, 1985–2005. A Longitudinal Study of Society in a Third World Megacity, Farnham: Ashgate International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 36 (6) 1349–64
6. Shamsuddoha et al (2012) Displacement and Migration from Climate Hot-spots in Bangladesh Causes and Consequences, Dhaka : ActionAid
7. IOM (2010) Assessing the Evidence: Environment, Climate Change and Migration in Bangladesh, Geneva: IOM.
8. Sarraf, M, Dasgupta, S, Adams, N. (2011) The cost of adapting to extreme weather events in a changing climate. Bangladesh development series paper ; no. 28. Washington D.C.: The Worldbank.
9. Hutton, D. and Haque, C.E., (2003) Patterns of Coping and Adaptation among Erosion-Induced Displacees in Bangladesh: Implications for Hazard Analysis and Mitigation, Natural Hazards 29, pp.405-421
10. The Least Develop Remittances and Diaspora Knowledge to Build Productive Capacities, [http://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/ldc2012\\_en.pdf](http://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/ldc2012_en.pdf)
11. Siddiqui, T. and Sultana, M (2013) Labour Migration from Bangladesh, 2012: Achievements and Challenges. Dhaka: RMMRU

## About the project

The field research for this policy brief was conducted in Chapai Nawabganj, Munshiganj and Satkhira districts of Bangladesh. It is part of the Climate change-related migration in Bangladesh project of the Sussex Centre for Migration Research, University of Sussex and Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit, University of Dhaka. The CDKN-funded project aims to understand, plan for and respond to climate-induced migration. It seeks ways to reduce vulnerability and build resilience of the Bangladeshi people to withstand the impact of climate change.

The project will produce qualitative and quantitative evidence on climate change and migration in Bangladesh, identify policy needs and make appropriate policy recommendations that will minimise the costs and risks and maximise the contribution of migration in response to climate change. The Government of Bangladesh is a key stakeholder in the project. This paper was written by Maxmillan Martin and Dominic Kniveton at the Department of Geography, University of Sussex and Tasneem Siddiqui and Mohammad Towheedul Islam of RMMRU. For more information please contact: [d.r.kniveton@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:d.r.kniveton@sussex.ac.uk) and [info@rmmru.org](mailto:info@rmmru.org).

**Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit**  
Sattar Bhaban (4th Floor)  
3/3-E, Bijoynagar, Dhaka-1000,  
Bangladesh.  
Tel:880-2-9360338  
Fax:880-2-8362441  
E-mail: [info@rmmru.org](mailto:info@rmmru.org)  
Web: [www.rmmru.org](http://www.rmmru.org) | [www.samren.net](http://www.samren.net)

**Sussex Centre for Migration Research**  
School of Global Studies  
University of Sussex  
Falmer, Brighton BN1 9SJ  
United Kingdom  
Tel: +44(0) 1273620662  
Email : [migration@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:migration@sussex.ac.uk)  
Web: [www.sussex.ac.uk/migration](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/migration)

This document is an output from a project funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and the Netherlands Directorate-General for International Cooperation (DGIS) for the benefit of developing countries. However, the views expressed and information contained in it are not necessarily those of or endorsed by DFID or DGIS, who can accept no responsibility for such views or information or for any reliance placed on them. This publication has been prepared for general guidance on matters of interest only and does not constitute professional advice. No representation or warranty (express or implied) is given as to the accuracy or completeness of the information contained in this publication, and, to the extent permitted by law, the entities managing the delivery of the Climate and Development Knowledge Network do not accept or assume any liability, responsibility or duty of care for any consequences of you or anyone else acting, or refraining to act, in reliance on the information contained in this publication or for any decision based on it. © Copyright Climate and Development Knowledge Network 2013.

RMMRU

CDKN

SCMR

RMMRU

CDKN

SCMR