

# The staggering scale of climate-related migration and the need for pro-poor policies

*Our research comprising a review of different government policies that relate to climate change and migration, sensitivity tests, assessment of upazila level population growth from 2001 to 2011 and analyses of qualitative and quantitative data from five districts of Bangladesh representing both origin and destination areas concludes that migration decisions of climate-vulnerable people are extremely complex [1]. Along with socio-economic and demographic conditions and other structural factors at the community, household, and individual level, climate stresses and shocks play an important role in the migration decision-making of people. 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 in which policy changes are required to reduce the risks associated with migration and enhance its contribution to development and resilience .*



**A migrant from Satkhira brings back home bags of food grains he got as wages for harvesting fields in Gopalganj.** Photo: Arjun Pandey

Migratory movements from and within Bangladesh are sensitive to climate change and variability. Displacement and internal migration are the most sensitive to climatic shocks [2]. Through analysis of upazila level data of population growth from 2001-2011, our study projects 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 different climate stresses such as inland flooding, storm surges and riverbank erosion, with less than a million migrating solely due to climate change. “Additionally, shorter term and circular migration is expected to be even larger than these figures” [3].

In the context of Bangladesh, 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 flush out saline water, construction of polders, drought- and salinity-resistant crop production, floating gardens, non-farm agricultural production, training for handicrafts production etc. All these interventions are important. Nonetheless, practitioners usually perceive migration as a failure of their local level programmes [4].

## Changing the mindset

As this research highlights, along with local-level adaptation, migration of one or a few members of the household increases the opportunity of people to adapt to climatic and other stresses. Therefore, traditional views that perceive migration as a problem needs to be replaced with more positive attitudes. Findings of our research can contribute to such a change. Emerging literature on climate change-related migration in different geographical contexts also recognises the potential role of migration for adaptation [5, 6, 7]. Barnett and Webber (2009), for instance, demonstrated that by migrating from climate-stressed areas people can reduce their vulnerability and ensure access to such income sources which are unlikely to be affected by a disaster. They further noted that in a post-disaster phase, remittances from relatives help households to recover from losses [8]. Tacoli (2011) showed that remittances from migrants facilitate agricultural adaptation in vulnerable communities in Bolivia, Senegal and Tanzania [7] while Ezra (2001) demonstrated that families with access to remittances better adapt to livelihood crises than those with no access to remittances [9]. Kothari (2003) noted that migration often helps in reducing pressures on local ecology and natural resource dependence, such as forests in the migrant-sending regions [10].

In the quantitative part of our research, 30 per cent of the 1500 interviewees identified riverbank erosion, flood and storm surges as the main reasons for shifting their homes. We found that climate-vulnerable communities in Chapai Nawabganj, Satkhira 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 the informal sector that includes brick kilns and construction sites. Some are self-employed in urban and peri-urban areas. During sowing and harvest seasons people also migrate to other villages for farm work.

With improvements in roads and other transportation networks, internal migration has become affordable to a large number of vulnerable households. Step migration – a series of short migrations from a person's place of origin to final destination – and social networks help such mobility. A section of vulnerable families send one or more members of their house-

-holds to other areas while rest of the family stays back. Together 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 benefits from the social safety net. Thus, they better prepare themselves to adapt to multiple climatic and livelihoods stresses.

## Gaps in policies

Our research reviewed four types of policies and found that linkages between migration and climate change have not been adequately addressed in the existing policy documents of Bangladesh [11].

The National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA), 2005, for instance, presents migration as a threat and different projects developed under NAPA aim to reduce the scope of migration from climate change-affected places to cities and thus halt its undesired “social consequences”. The updated NAPA document of 2009, however, has omitted the negative references to migration. The Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (BCCSAP) of 2008 saw migration of climate change affected people as a problem of unplanned urbanisation. The revised BCCSAP of 2009, however, highlights the need to understand the dynamics of climate change induced migration.

The Sixth Five Year Plan, Ten Year Perspective Plan, Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper and The Millennium Development Goals (MDG) – Bangladesh Progress Report 2011 highlight the importance of short-term labour migration in the economic development of the country. They did not focus on climate-related migration.

Most of these documents, except the MDG report, did not appreciate the contribution of internal migrants to the economy. They did not uphold the migrants' rights either. The Coastal Zone Development policy did not even mention migration. The disaster management policies and act present migration as vulnerability of the poor and rationalised several interventions as part of an attempt to halt rural-urban migration.

In 2006, the government framed an Overseas Employment Policy. However, the policy does not have any clause that deals with migration from climate change-affected areas. One can conclude that reforms are required in all these policies. The MGD report, however, showed empathy to internal migrants, especially those who end up living in urban slums and suggested a set of welfare measures.

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## Recommendations

Ministry of Environment and Forests, Ministry of Disaster Risk Management, Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, Planning Commission, National Environmental Committee, National Steering Committee on Climate Change, Climate Change Unit, and the 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.

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

***Framing of climate change policy:*** Bangladesh has an environmental policy but does not have a comprehensive climate change policy. The government should frame a comprehensive climate change policy aimed at 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 people. Reforms are needed to establish the rights of the displaced people in *khas* (state-owned) and diluvian (flood-related) land [12].

***Framing of an internal migration policy:*** A comprehensive policy needs to be developed to protect the rights of internal migrants. Wage and work conditions of construction, garment, and brick kiln industry workers, minimum age limitation of domestic workers, and measures to prevent labour exploitation and abuse in general should be part of internal migration policy.

***Recognition of brick kiln and domestic work as formal sector:*** The Ministry of Labour has drafted a labour law. The law, however, does not recognise brick kiln and domestic work as formal employment. 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 of climate stressed areas to short-term international contract migration.

***Inclusion of labour and overseas employment ministries in climate change committees:*** Representation from Ministry of Labour and Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, should be ensured

in the Inter-ministerial Climate Change Steering Committee, the technical committee of the Climate Change Trust Fund (CCTF), National Environment Committee, National Committee on Climate Change and Climate Change Unit. Climate change focal points should be established in both these ministries.

***Training in vulnerable areas:*** A scrutiny of local level adaptation programmes shows that skills imparted to the vulnerable households mostly concentrates on production of handicraft 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 Ministry of Expatriates Welfare and Overseas Employees Employment manages short-term contract migration processing work through its line agency, the Bureau of manpower employment and training (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 government established Prabashi Kallyan Bank (Migrant 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 government can also allocate matching grants for remittance receiving households to develop projects that would create employment at local level. Remittance bonds for climate-stressed areas can be introduced to provide reserves for micro-insurance schemes that local communities can purchase. Remittance bonds could also be used to fund other social safety net programmes.

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## About the research 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 Tasneem Siddiqui and Mohammad Towheedul Islam of RMMRU and Dominic Kniveton, Richard Black and Maxmillan Martin at the Department of Geography, University of Sussex. For more information kindly contact: [tsiddiqui59@gmail.com](mailto:tsiddiqui59@gmail.com) and [d.r.kniveton@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:d.r.kniveton@sussex.ac.uk)

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