

Factors of Migration in Urban Bangladesh: An Empirical Study of Poor Migrants in Rajshahi City

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Abstract: *This paper examines the factors of rural-urban migration in Bangladesh. It is found that the underlying cause of migration is mainly driven by economic and social factors i.e., unemployment, poverty, political and ethnic conflicts, religious etc. In the migration process the push factors are more active than pull factors, as poverty and unemployment always push the poor villagers to change their residence to the cities. After migration majority of the migrants comparatively improved their livelihoods in the city. Although poor migrants have contributed significantly to the economic growth and gained from higher wages in higher productivity areas, they remain socially and economically excluded from the wider benefits of economic growth such as access to food and education, housing, sanitation and freedom. The study results highlight the need to target migrant groups and urban poor within urban areas in the provision of availability of work and social care services.*

Introduction

Nearly one billion residents in cities of developing world are estimated to be poor, and the trend of urbanization and poverty increasingly alarming (Mehta, 2000). The number of people living in urban slums is expected to be double within 2025. Like other developing countries, the number of migrant dwellers is increasing very rapidly in urban societies of Bangladesh. Urban population is increasing mainly due to rural urban migration. Most of the migrants are rural poor who take shelter in slums, squatters, footpaths, rail stations and other scattered places. Bangladesh at present is 7th most populous country in the world. Based on the current rate of growth of population, the country's population (currently at 158 million) is expected to reach 206 million in 2025 (ESCAP, 2007). Like many countries, the rate of urban poor in Bangladesh is increasing. Migration has long been an important livelihood strategy for the people of Bangladesh. Every year, thousands of destitute victims of natural disasters pour into the cities from rural areas. Others come in the hope of a better life whenever the population rise to such an extent that people can no longer secure a livelihood, they migrated elsewhere. Even today, both poor and better off people pursue migration as a livelihood strategy in Bangladesh. In recent years, most of the cities in Bangladesh are experiencing rapid but unplanned urbanization. While the annual population growth rate is 1.7 per cent at national level, the percentage of urban growth is increasing faster and it is expected that more than 50 per cent of the population in Bangladesh will live in urban areas by the year 2025 (ESCAP, 2007).

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The rapid growth of population and consequent landlessness along with other factors of population displacement in the rural areas lead to rural unemployment, which generates a growing flow of migrants. It seems to be an inevitable process where the urban sector absorbs the surplus rural populace. In fact, population growth in the urban sector in Bangladesh, particularly in Rajshahi is predominantly due to migration of people from its peripheral rural areas. Most of the migrants who come from rural areas are poor, and hence the urban areas remain numerically dominated by the poor. The migrants originate largely from the economically depressed areas of the country (Sarwar and Rahman, 2004). Thus, it can be said that people of Rajshahi are well acquainted with the process of migration. The poor settlers in Rajshahi city have sought shelter in many urban areas. They live in different urban areas like rail line slums, municipal roadside areas, in riversides, and also often live on vacant lands.

In Bangladesh migration from rural to urban areas has become a livelihood strategy adopted by an increasing number of families who migrate to the city in search of better employment opportunities. Several studies (Deshingkar and Grimm, 2005; Narayan et al., 2002) also suggest that an increasing number of poor migrant every year migrate either permanently or seasonally to Rajshahi city. They move on their own, in groups or with siblings in search for job opportunities available in the city or to escape from unemployment and poverty situations at rural areas. The poverty argument in Bangladesh is strong, where many poor and land less migrants are forced to migrate to support themselves or their families (Ahmad, 2004).

This paper seeks to describe and discuss the factors of migration in Northern Bangladesh where the poor migrate from rural areas to Rajshahi city. Here we try to find out the root causes of their migration that pushed them to migrate to urban society leaving behind their origin.

Materials and Methods

The objectives of this study are to explore the causes of migration of the poor migrants, and try to identify the impact of urban migration on poverty reduction. Two selected areas namely Ramchandrowpur and Bhadra, which are situated in Rajshahi city in northern Bangladesh, were selected as study areas. This is a socio-anthropological study, so survey, observation and case study methods were used to conduct the research. In-depth interviews through structured questionnaire of 250 families were used to collect data. Other data were gathered by way of interviews of key informants, statistical yearbooks, local administrative and various related sources. For many elements of the study, qualitative and semi-quantitative analyses, guided by the research objectives, were carried out.

Results

Factors of Migration

According to the available empirical studies and evidences, the migration is always a selective process in which, the community, family or individuals fall into a certain category or characteristics and it varies extensively from culture to culture. Several studies reported that migration varies depending on socio-economic, demographic and cultural factors. That is lack of work availabilities, unemployment, poverty, natural disaster i.e., flood, draught, river erosion etc.; and others socio-cultural factors like, marriage, family conflict, better living, better education facilities, social discrimination, social prejudice, fanaticism, political chaos etc. also act as motivational factors of migration.

In order to examine the reasons, which facilitate or constrain migration by the poor, the present study used “factors of migration” as the main indicator and we found various factors of migration in urban areas. These are:

Natural factors

Natural disasters are a common feature in Bangladesh. *Manga* is one of them and affects millions of people especially in Northern part of Bangladesh. *Manga* is a *cyclical food insecurity* which occurs during the lean season and it directly affects those who are involved in agricultural activities. The agriculture in ‘the manga regions’ is mainly based on paddy cultivation. The employment opportunities for agricultural day-laborers, therefore, mainly depend on seasonal labor requirements for this crop. In between transplantation and harvest little labor is needed and as a result the income of day-laborers is low. Like the agricultural laborers, marginal farmers face manga, too. Their financial assets reduce towards the harvest. They have to give successive inputs to their fields, but they do not receive the return for their work until after harvest. The financial resources of many marginal farmers are not enough to ensure the inputs for their crops and sufficient food for their families at the same time.

Also, some groups or individuals are indirectly affected by the agricultural lean season. This is the case for all those who depend on the income of people affected by the agricultural lean season, like small traders and beggars. Due to the weak purchasing power they have no access to the market, i.e. they cannot buy enough food to fulfill their requirements. The access is sometimes further limited because the prices for basic foods often increase during manga. (Zug, 2006).

The poor people’s scarcity of work is in the region of Rangpur, Nelphamary, Kurigram, and Dinajpur especially in the months of *Ashshin* and *Kartik* (October-November). In their language, “we’ve no work, no food, how can we live?” So in order to survive they migrate to Rajshahi city in the quest of living. It is mentionable that migration takes places extensively from these regions.

Another important reason for their migration in Rajshahi city is that they know this city well or they have their neighbors or relatives in this city. Basically they prefer this known, and nearer city to others like Dhaka, Chittagong, Barishal, Sylhet, etc. For this reason we found higher rate of migration in this city. Although they all try heart and soul to remain in their respective native places, but sometimes they face a situation in which they have no alternative but to migrate.

In this regard the case of Ramjan Ali is mentionable here.

Ramjan Ali (Charkhoir village, Rajarhat union, Kurigram), a 37 years old farmer, was economically solvent. He had a family consisting of nine members including his parents, wife, three daughters and two sons. He had no want. He could maintain his family properly with what he could earn. Manga took place thrice at a stretch. His cultivable land was parched and he got no crop. Besides this he had no opportunity to engage himself in other profession in order to earn his living. Gradually all his money and wealth began to decrease. Soon one day he was in such a situation that he and his family members had to be half fed. He lost everything in his house and had nothing to feed his children. At one point he and his family members had to starve for three days continuously. Not only Ramjan Ali but also other farmers face the same situation

In this condition a person advised him to go to the city so that he could at least feed his children with some kind of food. But at first he did not agree to this proposal and did not want to leave his ancestors' dwelling place. But when his little daughter died of starvation, he with other villagers, decided to migrate to the city. At the beginning he came with his two sons in quest for work. He thought that if he could improve his condition, he would return to his village.

Coming to the city he, at first, did the work of a porter. After that he was pilling rickshaw. The two boys worked in hotels. They used to go home once in a week. They found that they could not improve their lot. But every year Manga came to them in their life and made them lose every thing. At last he left his home and came to the town with his family.

Like him there are many Ramjans who have migrated to the town because of Manga. In this study 24 percent of people migrated because of *Manga* (Table .1).

After Manga the second cause which is responsible for migration to the city is the flood and river bank erosion. In Bangladesh every year many families lose all their belonging owing to flood and riverbank erosion. So, the people living especially beside the river banks migrate to the city. From our study we have seen that 22 percent poor migrants have come to the city for these reasons (Table 1). Floods and riverbank erosion made them lose everything and they had to starve for days together and at one point they migrated to the city in search of living.

Economic factors

In explaining the economic condition of a poor family, the monthly income, owned cultivable land and profession are the important factors for migration. Economic activities and income in a rural society mainly depends on cultivable lands. In this study we found that poverty and unemployment are the factors to push them to the city. Poverty works as the main factor of every step of it. When there is no work and the stomach is empty, man tries his best to survive. Similarly when the poor people fail to feed their family in their native villages, they have to see the hungry faces of their beloved children and then try to get opportunities, even after trying heart and soul, to get rid of poverty, they are compelled to migrate to another place. Because of this poverty

they are now the inhabitants of towns. That is to say that 15 percent people migrate to the city because of poverty.

The agricultural sector does not have enough scope to absorb large numbers of laborer. Rural areas still lag behind in industrialization and thus unemployment is the general feature of this country. The adult, young, adolescent and children in rural areas do not find satisfactory employment. So people move to city area looking for employment. 9 percent respondents were found to migrate for this reason.

Table 1: Factors of Migration in Rajshahi City

<u>Reasons</u>	<u>Respondents</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Natural Factors		
a) <i>Manga</i>	60	24.0
b) Flood and River bank erosion	53	22.0
c) Storm	7	3.0
Total	120	49.0
Economic Factors		
a) Poverty	37	15.0
b) Unemployment	23	9.0
Total	60	24.0
Social Factors		
a) Population explosion	12	5.0
b) Marriage	11	4.0
c) Social inequality / discrimination , Religious violence	9	3.0
Total	32	12.0
Political Factors		
a) Crossing boarder	11	4.0
b) Involvement of politics	5	2.0
Total	16	6.0
Others	22	9.0
Total	250	100

Social factors

In the study area 4.8 percent of the poor migration has occurred only in big families and their family member ranges between 5 and 8 so that they could not manage sufficient food for their

family members. In case of poverty, 5 percent of poor migrant come to city. It is also interesting to note that the number of female children is higher than the male child in the poor families. Socially, it is an additional burden for them. So the poor families remain very anxious for the marriage of their daughters and want to reduce the number of family members through marriage. In this case we found 4 percent poor women who have migrated for reasons of marriage. In their word “there (native village) was not any opportunity for the poor people, all opportunity and benefit go to the elite of the village”. So they migrated to Rajshahi City. A few migrants were also found who left their villages for religious violence e.g. religious conflict, *fatwa* (religious edict) etc. The data also found that the women and husbands migrated alone in the city areas in search of employment opportunities. After migration they brought their wife/husband and children to join the informal jobs in the form of restaurant workers, maid servants, daily laborers, etc., to increase family income. Besides this, husbands brought their wives and children to join them.

Political factors

During the time of research we came to know that some migrant families came to Rajshahi in 1947, some in 1971 and some after 1971. Generally some communities of different religions of the west Bengal were living in India and they migrated (illegally crossing the river and by land route) to Bangladesh. Because they were the victims of different kinds of political torture, disparity etc. and now they are living in Rajshahi City. In our research we found that 4 percent poor migrants have come from India by crossing the border.

In this regard we came to know that political clash, and political dispute also compel people to migrate to the city. We found 2 percent migrants in this category. Among them some have migrated to the town because they were minority groups, some have migrated because their supported political party has been defeated in the election and they feared torture from the rival party, some feared that legal cases might be filed against them and some faced the treat of life. Here we can mention the case of Amzad Hossain:

Amzad Hossain (Vill. Sangbhag, PO. Zhalmalia, UP. Puthia, Zila.Rajshahi) 28 years old man, was an active supporter of Awamileague. He used to take part in different meeting, processions and all other party activities. For this reason he had a lot of influence in the village. One day a class took place between BNP and Awamileague in his village. In that clash many villagers were injured. He himself was also injured. Became BNP had much more influence, Amzad fled to Rajshahi city for the fear of the police. Then he was 19 years old. Since then Amzad has been living here. In his ward, “If the police didn’t come to my home, if I didn’t do politics, it would not to the town. I would do something to maintain my family in the village. After my arrival in the town the police and the leader of the opposite party would often come to my house and look for me. As a result one day I went home and took all my family members in the town.”

Other factors

Some migrant families left their villages because they mortgaged their land and took money from moneylenders or from the influential people of the rural areas but could not pay it back and thus lost the mortgaged land or property. Some other people have migrated due to the torture unleashed on them by the influential quarters of the villages. Some migrant families said that they got credit from NGOs and they could not use this money for appropriate purpose. They spent all credit loans for their own family consumption or repairing houses. This default of credit pushed them to migrate to Rajshahi city. In Rajshahi city they are engaged in informal working professions and earn money. For returning installment they go to villages and after payment they came back to city. For this system a lot of poor migrants stay in city areas for permanently (Table 1).

Places of Origin and Living Period in Rajshahi City

There are two major stands in migration theory. One is concerned with the transfer of labour from rural to urban areas and another is concerned with the effects of distance and choice of destination of the migration. It was found that migrants try to minimize distance, though they travel long distances and generally go to one of the great centers of commerce and industry. When social organization is concerned, migrants prefer to go to a place, which is as similar as possible to their place of origin (Connel *et. al.*, 1976). The choice of place by the migrants generally depend on the ability of bearing migration cost, extent of risk, availability of job, and various amenities, improved transport and communication facilities etc.

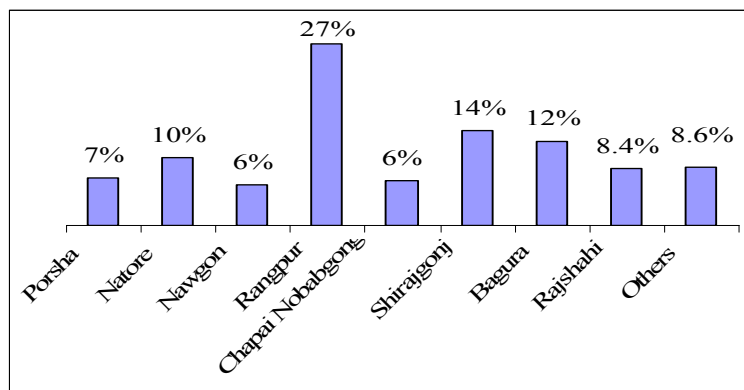


Figure 1: Place of Origin of the Poor Migrants

We already noted the causes of migration of the poor people from the district of Rangpur, Gaibandha and Dinajpur. Here we also see that from those regions the poor people have settled

in Rajshahi. The main problems of the people of those regions are lack of work and poverty. For this reason the poor people from these regions migrate to town in large number (Figure 1). As place of origin in migration Sirajgonj and its adjoining regions occupy the 2nd highest position. As the reason of this we can mention flood that affects these regions every year. Because of floods the poor people migrate to the town in groups. The other places of origin are not so much significant.

However, we have also found some families who have migrated from other districts i.e., Rajbari, Faridpur and Comilla. It is mentionable here that there is also a family where the husband whose place of origin is Comilla came to Rajshahi in search of work but he got married and settled here. So in respect of place of origin we see that people migrate in large numbers from the regions which are affected by natural calamities and economic crisis.

In our above discussion we found that the poor migrants choose the places before migration. We know our villages have little scope for working or earning. So that, a lot of poor people migrate from their native land to find jobs. In respect of choosing Rajshahi city, people who came here for work is 29.2 percent, while 26 percent choose this city for migration because it is nearer to their native lands, also the traveling cost is reasonable for poor migrants. About 25.2 percent migrants choose Rajshahi city as they have strong kin network in Rajshahi city. We also found that 10.4 percent came for other reasons e.g., safety, better education opportunity for child, health and treatment opportunities, more and better recreational opportunities and easy transportation, better roads etc.

Table 2: Reasons for Choosing Rajshahi City

<u>Reasons</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Work availability	73	29.2
Short distance from places of origin	65	26.0
Kin Network	63	25.2
Better life	26	10.4
Others	23	9.2
Total	250	100.0

The kinship network is a very important issue for choosing migration places or cities. During our field exploration we observed that kin networks played a crucial role of choosing places for the poor migrants. In any crisis period the kin interaction process like reciprocal obligations plays a strong role in making it easier to protect people against calamities. From the fieldwork it has been

found that in any crisis period the poorer migrants go to the rich for some sort of assistance through references of their kins. For this reason majority of poor people choose those places where their relatives live.

From this study we have seen that in Rajshahi, some migrant families have been living from before the liberation period (1971), some have been living after the liberation war and some have been living for 0-5 years. Of the living period in Rajshahi city (Figure 2) we find the highest percentage (30 percent) of migrant families have been living in urban areas for 06-10 years. That is to say, they have become urban bound in a certain period of time for a particular reason. Generally we know that the main cause of it is the devastating flood that took place in 1998 and some part of northern region of the country faced serious losses. That is when people migrated to different places among them the largest number migrated to Rajshahi city.

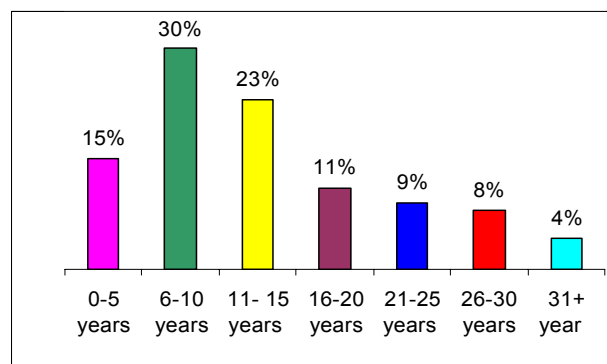


Figure 2: Living Period in Rajshahi City

Impact of Migration on Poverty Reduction

Migration has greater potential to poverty reduction, meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and contributing to economic growth in developing countries. This is because of four things: first, internal migrations stem from a broader base where smaller sums of money are evenly distributed to specific areas and poor families through internal remittances (rather than international remittances, which reach fewer people). Second, it is likely that internal migration will continue to increase at a faster rate than international migration. Third, internal migration involves poorer people from poorer regions and has a strong role to play in achieving the MDGs. Fourth, it is an important driver of growth in many sectors including agriculture, manufacturing, construction, coastal economies and services.

Migration can both cause and be caused by poverty. Similarly, poverty can be alleviated as well as exacerbated by population movement. Easy generalizations are impossible to make but it is likely that the relative impact of migration on poverty, varies by level of development of the area under consideration. The effects of migration on individuals, households and regions add up to significant impact on the national economy and society. In this respect we could consider some case studies below:

Case 1:

Monnaf, aged 34, lived in a village of Niamatpur under Nawgoan District. He started his work at the age of four due to the suffering from poverty in the Chowdury's (a rich landowner) house for meals only. At the age of 12, he migrated to Nawgoan city and stayed six months as a hotel boy. Once, his friend Sirajul told him to go to Rajshahi City, because he heard that Rajshahi has many more opportunities to earn money. So, Monnaf decided to go to Rajshahi City with his friend Sirajul. It was mid July 1987 when they migrated to Rajshahi city without any capital in their hands. At first they slept on the footpath at night, and doing several jobs in the city area. Few days later they found a job in motor garage and were able to rent a room in the slum of Bhadra area. In the mean time Monnaf visited his village several times and was able to send money to his family. After passing three years in Rajshahi, his younger brothers, influenced by him, migrated to Rajshahi. Now his parents are living in Niamatpur village but he and his brother still living in Rajshahi City. His main profession is rickshaw pulling and small shop keeping as a secondary occupation. His monthly income is around Tk. 6000 and he is satisfied with his life after migration.

CASE 2:

Shri Nirmol Das is a strong, healthy 50 year old man. He is working as a day laborer in Rajshahi city. Before migration he was a farmer and knew only farming. He has six family members including his one divorced daughter. They did not have enough cropland in the village where they lived previously. Nirmol worked in a shared cropping field and his teenage son also worked with him. But, suddenly one day, they were affected by flood and lost their property. At that time some of the villagers left their village and migrated to city area. Nirmol and his family also decided to leave village and migrated to Rajshahi city. After their migration they stayed with other villagers who migrated before them. But after one week Nirmol managed to get work and also tried to manage work for his family members. Previously he changed his job many times, but now he is working as a road and house construction laborer. Now his monthly income is average Tk. 2500 and his three sons also earn Tk. 5000. Now his life is better than before and he is satisfied with his present life. He and his family members do not think of going back to his village, because they have improved their life after migration.

Case 3:

Ramjan Halder (35) was living at Halderpara in Krishnapur village of Pabna District. He was a fisherman, an occupation that ran in his family. He used to fish in his childhood with his father and other relatives. He went to the Padma river and Chalanbeel wetland in Rajshahi and Natore to catch fish.

The big river Padma is good to catch fish. So he migrated to Rajshahi city and stayed in Ramchandrapur slum of the Padma riverbank. Now he earns average tk., 150 per day which was sufficient to maintain his livelihood. But now- a- days, living costs are increasing so this small amount hardly covers anything. In such reality, Ramjan doesn't know what he will do, as he is facing trouble in his traditional occupation.

Conclusion

Migration is a natural process where normally surplus manpower released from the rural sector is needed for urban industrial growth. Rural-urban migration can be considered socially and economically beneficial because it enables human resources to shift from locations where their marginal products and hence earnings are either zero or very low to places where these are high and also growing. In general, the decision of migration comes to be the function of variables like

the income differential between the countryside and the town, the chance of getting a job, the risk attitude of the migrant, and information on availability of jobs in urban locations. Thus a migrant may often fail to find an appropriate job in the city. Before migration one might have had a rural sector job which may be of a very low productivity, but after migration it often happens that he ends up getting no job whatsoever, thus becoming unemployed.

The present study reveals that rural-urban migration and hence urbanization in Bangladesh is poverty driven, caused by extreme entitlement contraction among a sizeable segment of the rural population, who happen to be among the marginalized peasantry and the landless poor. The migration of the rural poor to the urban centers has caused a direct transmission of rural poverty and backwardness to the towns, engendering the process of 'ruralization' of the urban areas. The pull factors, which attract the rural people and induce them to migration to urban locations, are in a large measure the direct or indirect results of government's development policy and effort, that have always been biased towards the urban areas. Thus, allocation of public funds in the successive five year plans has been consistently biased towards the urban, and against the rural sectors.

It may be mentioned here that, apart from enhanced job prospects, better educational and health care facilities and other social amenities that are necessary for better living conditions are added attractions of the migrants towards the city life. In our study, a number of respondents indicated that they had migrated to the city with a view to giving their children a better education. They feel that there is a wide gap between the urban and rural areas in terms of both the quality of education and the type of educational institutions providing a wide range of facilities, which encouraged them to migrate. In order to stop poor people from migration, therefore, the essential pre-conditions seem to be the expansion of employment opportunities, as mentioned above, and also the creation of better living conditions through improved availability of essential health care and occupational services. Unless the like of the amenities enjoyed by migrants in the cities can be made available in the rural areas, at least partly, if not to the fullest extent, the idea of alleviation of poverty through inducing and sustaining the process of reverse migration will hardly be translated into reality.

It is admitted on all hands, however, that alleviation of poverty in Bangladesh has been at the heart of the Government's development strategy, particularly since independence of the country. Implicitly, one objective of such strategy has also been to slow down the pace of rural-urban migration, and for that matter to reduce the problems associated with excessive urbanization.

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