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# Impact of rural urban migration on physical and social environment: The case of Dhaka city

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## Abstract

Rural urban migration is the principle component of rapid and unplanned growth of towns and cities in the developing countries. Gross disparities in socio-economic opportunity between urban and rural areas and frequent natural disasters in some regions encourage large flow of migrants from rural Bangladesh to the large cities. For various reasons Dhaka is an attractive destination for the rural migrants. Migration to Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh, is the focus of this article which identifies the factors contributing to the migration process. The impact of migration is diverse both at the urban destination and at the rural origin. At both ends there are economic, demographic, environmental and socio-cultural impacts. This paper focuses on the urban end. It examines the overall conditions of the underprivileged, poor migrants and the consequences of migration on the physical and social environment on their choice of destination.

**Keywords:** Rural-urban migration, Social environment, Physical environment, Dhaka city

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## 1. Introduction

The rapid growth of rural-urban migration (RUM) has been a common feature of the developing countries. There are various reasons for its occurrence and these reasons may vary from country to country. However, the consequences of this type of migration have similar effects for different countries. RUM is the most crucial component of internal migration of any country. It poses some problems in the rural as well as in the urban areas, even though there are benefits derived from it (Ullah, 2003). In recent years, most of the cities in Bangladesh are experiencing rapid urbanization and RUM is the most important factor behind it. Bangladesh is one of the highest rates of growth of urban population. According to UN projection, the size of the urban population will be about 100 million by the year 2025 (UNESCO, 2009). Millions of rural people are migrating to divisional cities of Bangladesh. Migration to Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh is the main focus of this paper. In this paper an attempt has been made to explore why a large number of people from rural Bangladesh are migrating to this city and what are the consequences of this movement on the physical and social environment of the city. Although the consequences of RUM are diverse and deep, both at the urban destination and at the rural origin, this study focuses only on the urban destination.

This paper is a literature based review. There is no empirical effort in this study. The work is done entirely on the basis of secondary sources.

## 2. Rural urban migration

Migration is broadly defined as a relocation of residence for a specified duration and various reasons (Hossain, 2001). Migration incorporates all kinds of movement of people from one place to another. It may take place within a particular geographical boundary of a country and then beyond its boundaries.

RUM is the movement of people from the country side to the urban centre. Migration may be permanent in nature or it may be temporary. People may choose to migrate voluntarily or they may be forced into it. Both at the urban destination and at the rural origin there are demographic, economic, socio-cultural and environmental impacts of migration which is diverse and deep.

### 2.1. Factors of rural urban migration in Bangladesh

The factors of migration are characterized by two major categories - one is Pull and the other is Push. According to Braun (2004), people tend to be pulled to the areas of prosperity and pushed from the areas of decline. Push factors attribute to the negative characteristics operating at the centre of origin whereas pull factors identify the positive characteristics at the centre of destination (Dalta, 2002).

Actually, migration is the combined effect of both push and pull factors (Everett, 1996). Within Push-Pull Model push factors are operative at the rural end while pull factors are operative at the urban destination. Push factors push people toward the cities and pull factors attract them. Urban bias is held responsible for RUM (Han, 1999).

RUM is a multi-causal phenomenon. It is usually compound by environmental, social, economic, political and other factors. Much of the literature on migration focuses on RUM as a result of environmental or economic crises. But a large proportion of RUM are due to marriage and other familial reasons (loses of husband, divorce, joining family/relatives etc).

The following table summarizes the findings of several studies (Islam, 1999; Ullah, 2003; Haider, 2010) on factors of rural migration to urban Bangladesh.

Table 1. Push and pull factors of RUM in Bangladesh

Push Factors	Pull Factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Landlessness</li> <li>• Adverse person to land ratio</li> <li>• Frequent and severe natural disasters (drought, flood, mona, river bank erosion)</li> <li>• Homelessness</li> <li>• Loss of income sources</li> <li>• Unemployment and poverty</li> <li>• Absence of industries</li> <li>• Law and order situation</li> <li>• Village politics</li> <li>• Lack of social and cultural opportunities (education, health care, recreational facilities)</li> <li>• Do not like village (particularly rural rich)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job/Earning opportunities</li> <li>• Easy access to informal sector</li> <li>• Higher incomes/Rural-urban wage differentials</li> <li>• Rural urban disparities in social amenities and services (education, health care, recreation)</li> <li>• Positive information about the city (garments factory jobs)</li> <li>• Better livelihood</li> <li>• Fast and colorful life in city</li> <li>• Joining families/relatives</li> <li>• Willingness to change and see new places</li> </ul>

## 2.2. Reasons behind Dhaka bound migration flow

For the millions of rural poor in Bangladesh, Dhaka is an attractive destination. Migrants in Dhaka predominantly come from the Northern and Southern parts of the country. Comilla, Sherpur and Barisal are the top three districts from where rural urban migrants predominantly come (Ishtiaque and Mahmud, 2011).

Compared to any other place in the country, Dhaka offers the best chance for economic opportunity. Administrative headquarters and civil employments, financial and banking services, international commerce and business are all largely concentrated in Dhaka (Islam, 1999). More than 80 percent of the garment industries of Bangladesh are located here. With these industries a large number of young female came to Dhaka.

Despite the growth of formal sector industrial and other employment, Dhaka is dominated by the presence of a huge informal sector of economic activities. It has been estimated that about 65% of all employment in the city is in the informal sector (World Bank, 1999). Work in the informal sector has a potential role in influencing RUM.

Many migrants seek opportunities in the informal sector and make their living. Here a large number of people are involved with the informal economy of rickshaw pulling, hawkery, roadside business, junk collecting etc. Others find jobs as drivers, mechanics, carpenters, barbers, daily laborers and personal servants. Anyone can make some kind of living in Dhaka. Various economic activities and variety of services tend to support a continuous influx of migration in the city. A large segment of the migrant population tends to be uneducated, unskilled and ill equipped for the city. Yet they migrate with expectations of a better life in the metropolis.

The migrants carry with them the hope and dream of better living and livelihood. They come to the city to fulfill their needs and desire which cannot be fulfilled in the rural areas as rural Bangladesh lack opportunities. Migrants are usually concerned with the benefits they hope to gain by moving and usually give less thought to the problems that they will incur as a result of the process.

### **3. What happens then to the poor migrants who come to Dhaka city?**

Migration to Dhaka causes economic, social and cultural improvements for some people but also deterioration in the overall urban environment and a very low standard of living for the very large number of migrants who constitute the poor. The urban benefits fail to touch the majority of the poor migrants. Soon after arriving to the city the incoming population put themselves in helpless condition. As rural people are poorer than urban people, many of them cannot afford the living expense of Dhaka city's residential areas. In that case, urban slums become a popular destination for rural urban migrants. Dhaka city alone contains about 3.4 million people in 4966 slums (Ishtiaque and Mahmud, 2011). Actually most of the slums of Dhaka are composed of poor rural urban migrants from various regions of the country. Due to sequential migration, population growth rate in Dhaka is much higher than natural growth of population in the country. RUM is one of the major contributors to rapid, haphazard and unplanned growths of Dhaka city. Now Dhaka is the living place of 119 million people (BBS, 2011). Overcrowding of people has created severe pressure on the existing social and physical infrastructures and its absorbing capacities. Necessarily, environmental, social, economic and political problems of major significance are being created. The state of Dhaka's infrastructure is inadequate and unable to keep up with growing urban pressure. In regard to RUM, where migrants escaping environmental degradation (drought, flood, river bank erosion) in their rural homes face new environmental risks in Dhaka, that only add to their exiting vulnerability. Now an attempt will be made to make an overview of the overall physical and social environmental problems of the city that are attributable to the process of RUM.

### **4. Overall physical and social environment in Dhaka city**

The overall physical environment in an urban area is determined by some specific facilities such as housing, sanitation, sewerage, drainage, drinking water supply, gas supply, electricity, garbage disposal and waste

management. In Dhaka city these services are extremely unsatisfactory and of poor quality, which is due to rapid increase of urban population (in-migration of the rural poor to Dhaka city) and limitation of resources. There is a chronic shortage of housing, congestion in public transport, acute crisis in supply of water, gas and electricity. Increasing pressure of population upon the civic amenities has resulted in air, water, noise pollution and an increase in urban crimes. The city is characterized by high level of poverty and social vulnerability, shortage of housing, infrastructure and social services, poor quality of physical and social environment and inefficient urban management (Hossain, 2006).

#### 4.1. Shortage of housing facilities and development of slums and squatter settlements

Shortage of housing is quite acute as the prevailing situation fails to accommodate the rapidly growing city population. As a result slums and squatter settlements are widespread in different areas of Dhaka city. It has been reported that, all the thanas of Dhaka Metropolitan area have slum population. Slums and squatter settlements have mostly developed in the peripheral thanas of Mirpur, Mohammadpur and Demra (Hossain, 2008). Actually, most of the slums of Dhaka are composed of rural migrants from various regions of the country. They come to the city in search of jobs, in most cases for the sake of survival and find themselves shelter less. This situation compels them to live in slums.

Dhaka alone contains about 3.4 million people in 4966 slums. (Ishtiaque and Mahmud, 2011). The population density of the slums is extremely high. Most of the slums and squatters have a single room for the whole family that makes them highly congested and unhealthy.

Slums dwellings in Dhaka can be found in such low laying areas as ditch embankments and on the edges of lakes, rivers, sewers and near the road side and railway line. Most of the slums have temporary structure with semi-permanent building materials (thatch, bamboo, wood, straw and scraps). The practical situation of all these settlements indicates a dreadful life with poor lighting and ventilation. Due to the location and the forms of these houses basic services and amenities cannot be provided in these houses. This poor housing, lifestyle and dwellers activities are creating not only environmental problems but also social crime. In many of the slums, overall conditions in housing service and health are worse than those in the rural areas. Indoor pollution, degradation of air quality, increase incidence of communicable diseases is attributable to this poor housing. The health conditions in slums are extremely bad and hazardous for both dwellers and other citizens. Fire is a common hazard in the city's slum areas. Over the years, the situation is aggravating and it is becoming a threat for the serious environmental disaster of the city.

#### 4.2. Delivering of basic services

Additional people have created tremendous pressure on the urban utility services. Dhaka city faces problems in almost all areas of its basic utility services.

##### 4.2.1. Gas and electric supply

The slum dwellers do not have access to the gas supply. They use various traditional forms of fuel like wood, straw, cow dung and waste paper for cooking. Access to electricity is far from universal and sometimes access to these services is accomplished through illegal means.

#### *4.2.2. Water supply and sanitation facility*

In Dhaka 49% of the population have access to piped water supply and the remaining have to depend on private hand pumps and unspecified sources. People living in slums do not have access to piped water. Piped water is unsafe to drink directly. Inadequate safe drinking water increases health risks.

Only a small portion of the city dwellers have access to sewerage system. None of the slums get proper sewerage service from Dhaka Water and Sewerage Authority (DWASA). A large number of people use open space, ditches and drains for defecation. Particularly the slum poor have no proper fixed toilets.

#### *4.2.3. Garbage disposal and waste management*

There is no proper arrangement of collection and disposal of garbage. Garbage is usually dumped along the road corner, open areas, unused lands, and ditches into nearest water bodies. Only 9% of the slum population manages to get solid waste management services (IOM, 2010). As a result both household waste and human generated wastes go directly or indirectly into the low lying lands, open spaces or water bodies of the city and causes a number of environmental and health problems.

#### *4.2.4. Drainage facilities*

Poor drainage system brings sufferings to the city dwellers. All areas of Dhaka experience rain water stagnation. The situation becomes worse during flood. The flood water submerges and quickly destroys the low lying and slum areas.

## **5. Poor quality of physical and social environment**

The environmental condition of Dhaka has deteriorated significantly. Dhaka is a city of noise, air and water pollution. The rivers of Dhaka city (Buriganga, Balu, Turag and Tangi khal) are already polluted. The rivers are becoming dead due to the illegal occupation of the people. Almost everywhere the air is polluted. Air pollution in all indicators in Dhaka is one of the highest in the world (Islam, 1999). There is also high level of noise pollution. Massive traffic congestions have become regular feature of the city which leads to noise and air pollution. Uncollected garbage increases in noxious odor. Some people 'co-exist with garbage' in the city.

Land is a scarce commodity in the city. More than 70% of the city's population has no access to land. The price of land in the city is beyond the ability of the common people. Land filling is a very common practice in the city especially to mitigate the land pressure. Traditionally solid wastes have been used as a convenient way to infill land. Domestic and toxic waste are not always treated separately and often dumped together in

the same site. This creates a lot of environmental hazards in Dhaka city (Ahmed, 1996). Deforestation, cutting down of trees, encroachment and filling of water bodies are caused mainly by overpopulation. This has resulted in an adverse effect on the environment of the city.

The environment of the city is physically and socially lacking because an adequate proportion of its land has not been put aside as open space. Some of the open spaces, such as parks, are being constantly encroached on by land grabbers with the support of those in power. Also, the increasing presence of anti-social elements in the places (particularly in parks and cinema halls) poses a serious threat to their proper use by citizens (Siddiqui et al., 2000). Children's are deprived of open playgrounds. Slum children have nothing but streets to play on.

### 5.1. Social environment of the city

When a person migrates to the city, he/she faces a challenge of mobility within the new setting and new environment. This mobility may require a new life style, new attitudes and new behavioral patterns (Haider, 2010). The migrants have rendered the social environment of metropolitan Dhaka with a peculiar mix of rural and urban traits and attitudes (Islam, 1996). The mix of population within the city varies from the highly educated to the illiterate, the technologically advanced to the unskilled, the white-collar worker to the maimed beggar (Begum, 1999).

#### 5.1.1. Urban poverty

Dhaka city has a dichotomous reality. It is a place of deprivation and plenty, growth and congestion, poverty and wealth. There is a sharp contrast between the rich and the poor. The incidence of urban poverty resulting from rapid urban growth is indicated by the proportion of slum dwellers in Dhaka who live below the poverty line. High density of population makes the environment of the slums more than abominable.

#### 5.1.2. Unemployment/informal sector activities

Most of the migrants involve themselves in the informal sector activities. People employed here get less monetary benefits. In many cases they adopt unfair means for livelihood like smuggling, begging, drug trafficking, trafficking of women, prostitution etc (Nasir&Pervin, 1997).

#### 5.1.3. Anti – social activities

Now Dhaka has emerged as a city of crime and insecurity. Among the many negative social consequences of migration are the increase in the incidence of crime and violence. Social unrest, theft, robbery, hijacking, kidnapping, murder, illegal rent or toll collection, frustration, drug addiction is prominent among the serious city problems. Criminal and anti-social activities are found to be located especially within slums. Quarrel, clash, conflict in the slums and squatter settlements is a regular phenomenon which creates noise and violence that disturbs the nearby city dwellers. Thus a healthy social environment in the city is being threatened.

## 6. Conclusion and recommendation

Rapid urbanization of Dhaka city due to RUM has created severe pressure on existing infrastructures and its absorbing capacities. Improved urban environmental management is therefore, clearly of critical importance. Despite the unfavorable living conditions of most of the migrants in Dhaka city, the migration happens. Strong urban pull factors kept the migrants from leaving the city while weak pull factors of the country's rural area failed to bring the migrants back to village (Ishtiaque and Mahmud, 2011)

Therefore, reducing disparities between rural and urban areas would appear to be good tool to discourage RUM. Rural development with creating adequate facilities and services and enhancing income earning opportunities should receive urgent attention.

A balanced development strategy to encourage growth of secondary cities and small townships are of utmost importance to reduce RUM. And overall the government has to play an effective role in adopting and implementing a comprehensive urban policy accommodating the existing urban population to facilitate their improved life and livelihood. Improvement of urban management is essential for a sustainable future of the city.

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