

Rural-to- Urban Migration in Bangladesh: From the Perspective of Poverty and Life Standard

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ABSTRACT : *Migration is an ancient phenomenon in the history of human beings. Unlike international migration, internal migration creates fewer positive changes in the life of migrants. Bangladesh is experiencing rural-urban migration at an excessive rate which basically happens due to over urbanization in the country. This study intends to investigate the causes of rural-to-urban migration in Bangladesh. Thematic analysis was used in the present study as a method of qualitative data analysis for secondary interview data which was collected through IDI with several rural to urban migrants in Bangladesh. The findings show that poverty, lack of education and job skills, and marriage are the main reasons for such a pattern of migration in Bangladesh. The findings of the study also show that such rural-urban migrants do not draw on quality resources to facilitate their migration and as result migration does not always bring positive changes in their lives; rather, sometimes, it results in more suffering and struggles for the migrants in a new place.*

Keywords- : *Migration, rural, urban, poverty, life-standard*

I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of poverty has been a subject of debate for many centuries. It is therefore important that concepts, definitions and measurements of poverty are applicable to the society in which they are applied (Bhorat, 2001). There are, therefore, different meanings attached to poverty and its impact on society. Poverty studies and definitions thus lead to an identification of goods needed by human beings in order to keep on living. An important factor regarding the definition of poverty is the ability to function as a full and active member of the society and have individual dignity (SPII, 2007). It is now widely acknowledged that poverty is a multi-dimensional phenomenon which includes other essential dimensions of living standards. In addition to income and consumption, health and education are now part of the definition of poverty (Sabry, 2009). Laderchi, Saith and Stewart (2003) identify four different approaches to defining and measuring poverty. These consist of approaches that attempt to measure individual deprivation, based on monetary income or on indicators of capability failure, approaches that are based on concepts of social exclusion and approaches that reply on participatory methods to establish the views of the poor themselves. So, it can be said that the components of poverty has a direct relation with some basic requirements of living standard.

Poverty causes several issues in our life and sometimes, due to poverty, we need to alter some of our common practices and beliefs. Migration, for an example, is often seen simply as a flight from poverty: there are no opportunities available locally so people migrate in order to survive. Migration is considered as the movement of people from one geographic region to another, which may be

temporary or permanent in nature. The reasons for it vary from one person to another depending on the situation that brought about the decision, but poverty often is one of those reasons (Adewale, 2005, National Geographic Society, 2005). Every kind of migration be that internal (and regional) or international has its own advantages. Nevertheless, internal and international migration co-exist along a range of migration practices and share a number of empirical, conceptual and theoretical concerns with policy implications at local, national and supranational scales (Anh, 2003; Deshingkar, 2006; IOM, 2006; King and Skeldon, 2010). Internal migration can be classified as rural-rural migration (a person migrates from one rural region to another rural region), rural-urban migration (a person migrates from a rural region to an urban city or unit), urban-rural migration (a person migrates from an urban unit to a rural region) and urban-urban migration (a person migrates from one urban unit to another urban unit (Sinha, 2005). There are many perspectives on the migration decisions of individuals or households. In conventional theory, individuals relocate to maximize utility given spatial variation in wage and price levels (Molloy, 2011; Valencia, 2008). Since the purpose of migration is to find jobs or achieve a higher income, we assumed that the income and living standards of households with migrants were higher than those without migrants (De Brauw and Harigaya 2007). The researcher wanted to investigate the internal relation between migration and poverty as well as the impact of migration on the life standard of some Bangladeshi internal migrants.

Bangladesh reached the rank of a low-middle-income country in 2014 (Feldman, 2015; World Bank 2016). As the country grew economically, there was a significant increase in urban migration of Bangladesh over the last decade (Hossain 2001; Rouf and Jahan 2007). The urban population of Bangladesh was only 6.27 million in 1974 but grew to over 53.1 million in 2014 (United Nations 2014) and has reached to 70 million in 2023 (Worldometer, 2023). The urbanisation level (meaning percentage of population living in urban areas) has jumped from 8.78 per cent to 27.66 per cent in this period. The percentage of urban growth has been estimated at about 3.5% per year (Streatfield P. K, 2008.) and the rural to urban migration rate was 4.29 per 1,000 persons per year for the whole country (BBS, 2020). So, it can be said that urbanization is proceeding rapidly in Bangladesh. Migration is considered a primary contributor to the fast-urban growth alongside highly urban centralized development, rapid urban industrialization, and temporary in-migration during lean seasons (Harpham 2009; Seto et al. 2010; Farhana et al. 2012; Bryan et al. 2014). As urbanization in Bangladesh is happening so rapidly, partly through migration from rural to urban areas, an improved understanding of its reason and impact is increasingly important. Besides, the internal migration scenario in Bangladesh warrants an investigation on the reasons for such rapid urban migration to aid policy makers to balance urban-rural developments.

In Bangladesh, previous studies indicate that migration is a key response of households and individuals to both economic opportunities and livelihood difficulties. Phan and Coxhead (2010) used data from the 1989 and 1999 Censuses to investigate migration patterns and determinants and the role of migration on cross-province income differentials. They found that areas with higher per capita income attract more migrants. So, it is common that people with low income living in villages tend to immigrate to change their economic situation. However, research show that, in most cases, the fate of the migrant remain unchanged and continues to fight with poverty. The present study, hence, wants to investigate how poverty work as a driving force behind rural to urban migration in Bangladesh and how the migrants' life standard affected altered due to their migration.

II LITERATURE REVIEW

Baumol and Blinder (2009) recognise two main approaches of poverty. The first is the absolute approach which regards poverty lines as the absolute subsistence level; that is the level of living necessary to maintain health and the ability to work. The absolute approach views poverty as the failure of needs fulfilment, which impairs the ability of the individual or the family to function adequately in society. The second approach, the relative approach, regards poverty as a relative concept. The relative approach maintains that poverty can be understood only as part of a given society, and that the situation of the poor is determined by its distance from the other strata of society. Lack of food and nutritional security, income security, social security and human security build up the ingredients of poverty. When people have physical and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritional food to meet daily needs, and food preferences for an active and healthy life at all times,

then this is referred to as food security. Income security refers to income brought home through regular employment. Social security means access to education, health services and opportunity of acquisition of skills, and human security (Das, 2006:8 - 9). According to White and Killick (2001), the causes of poverty are multi-faceted and include economic, social and political, international and national (macro and micro) factors. Poor access to affordable education increases poverty and high levels of corruption undermine efforts to make a suitable impact on poverty. Moore (2009) further cites that healthcare services can also cause poverty. According to SPII (2007) there are three basic explanations to the causes of poverty: namely, residual, pathological and structural.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2005), poverty extends to fields such as health, education, gender, children and employment. It is difficult to warn illiterate people of the dangers of various illnesses. Children from poor families are prone to hunger, irritability, headaches and other illnesses which may hamper educational progress. There is a greater possibility that children from poor families will drop out of school at an earlier age. Poor children are likely to suffer from hunger, fatigue, irritability, headaches and other illnesses which could restrict their focus and concentration (Shepard and Greene, 2003:22). The extent, depth and severity of poverty are significantly higher amongst females and female-headed households (Posel and Rogan, 2011:11). It has long been recognised that poverty is a precursor to homelessness for most, but not all, of those who experience it (Fitzpatrick, 2005; Shinn, 2010). It is also widely acknowledged that homeless people suffer from persistently low incomes and financial exclusion (Wallace and Quilgars, 2005) and, furthermore, that homelessness impinges upon their ability to secure a route out of poverty (Tunstall et al., 2013). Moreover, financial disadvantage often persists even after people are rehoused (Pleace et al., 2008; Fitzpatrick et al., 2010), in that many formerly homeless people continue to struggle with low incomes and debt in the long term (Busch Geertsema, 2005; Crane et al., 2011). Studies by Cuthrell, Stapleton, and Ledford (2010) indicate that one in three African American children live in poverty. The Hispanic population, predicted to soon represent one in four of the American populace is 58% more likely to have households living below the federal poverty level (Martin, 2007). Poverty can also have a devastating impact on interpersonal and family relationships. Babis (2021) proposed that there should be more policies supporting migrants. However, labor migrants had also received quite high income to help their families

Due to the occurrence of migration there arises various social, economic, and cultural issues in the region. (Alemante&et.al, 2006). People moving from small rural areas to large urban regions cause some serious threats to both the urban economy and urban geography. Some of the people migrate to get rid of conflict, oppression, or ecological dangers. The choice of migration is usually associated with major life changes, like pursue of higher education, getting employment or getting married. This occurrence has led to social, cultural and demographic renovation of the groups of origin and destination (United Nation, 2013). Todaro and Smith (2003) states that rural-urban migration takes place because of differences not in real earnings but because of expected income in both the sectors. Mainly people migrate to urban centers to earn better income and get a better job.

So, it can be said that most of the literatures reviewed above have provided us a deep insights into the cause-effect of migration and its notable impact on the life standard in general and specially on the whole way of life of the migrants. These studies have been conducted in different context and they have dealt with partial issues and that is why they are not enough to understand the whole circle of poverty, life standard and rural-urban migration fact in Bangladesh. So, the present study aims at exploring those unexplored horizons.

III OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Based on the gaps found in the reviewed literatures, the researcher has developed the following objectives for the present study.

- 1) To find out how poverty affect the rural people as one of the driving forces behind their migration to the urban areas
- 2) To explore the effect of the internal migration on the living standard of the rural to urban migrants

IV METHODOLOGY

The present study is based on qualitative research method in the stage of data collection and data analysis. It involved 11 low income migrants from rural to urban area in Dhaka city of Bangladesh as study participants and collected data from them. Among the participants, the number of male participants was five and the number of female participants was six. Most of the male participants' age was between 25-35 and having one child of each. On the other hand, the age range of the female participants was 30-35 years and three of them had two children of each and the rest of the three female participants had one child of each. Only the two participants among the eleven were living with their spouse and the rest of the participants' spouse migrated elsewhere. Majority of the participants were from low income background doing daily payment based work. For data, in-depth interview was conducted with the participants and in the process of data collection, the participants were asked several key questions as well as follow-up questions which were related to a wide range of issues covering various aspects of their personal, social, economic and professional life. The interview questions mainly focused on the life history of the participants, reason behind their migration, economic and social condition at different stages of their lives, their future expectations, children's education and medicine, foods as well as social and familial relations. The interview questions were designed considering the context to which the participants were involved. Analytical method was used to analyze the collected data to understand the cause-effect relationships between various variable of this particular study. During the analysis, the data were classified into several categories focusing on the various major aspects of the participants' lives. While forming the categories, comparison between different variables was made. The, categories were integrated depending on their properties and determined the boundaries of the integrated categories to form theories, While writing the discussion, all the properties of the major categories have been considered and discussed elaborately. Some major categories and themes are related to the causes of migration and the impact of migration on various aspects of lives. Poverty being a distinctive category emerged from the analysis which play the key role in showing the relationship among the variables. Different components of life standard also emerged as themes after analyzing the data. The categories and the themes and the cause-effect relationship among them has been discussed in the next section.

V FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

From the analysis, it has been observed that different reasons caused the migration of the participants from one place to another. The major driving issue that instigated migration be the economic instability of the participants. Most of the time the participants decided to migrate to the urban areas because of poor economic background of their family resulting in the dependence of family members on a single person for familial cost. In that case financial security remained absent and migration becomes inevitable. In the rural areas there exists scarcity of work which also causes mobility of the inhabitants of the rural areas. One of the participants remarked in this regard:

First of all, I did not live in a privileged environment. I eventually had to fight for a normal existence. It is the main cause. Second, because of my poor financial situation, I had to work hard to improve my lot in life. In order to improve my life and lessen my reliance on our family, I wanted to pursue something outside. I consequently believed that I had to leave my hometown. And once I departed, I stopped returning.

The similar issue has been found in some other studies as well (e.g., Adams and Page, 2005; and Acosta et al., 2007). They mentioned that people get migrated from low productivity area to high labor productivity area for more income so that they can get rid of severe poverty. Even the members of a family willing to involve themselves to earning activities fail to explore suitable income opportunities in exchange of physical labor staying in the village. In that case financial decentralization in a family becomes a far cry resulting in a centralized in most cases one man or woman dependent financial system. It means a person becomes responsible for supplying all necessities for the family members. It causes immense pressure on that individual and forces him/ her to decide for migration for increasing their income. In that case, migration often take place from rural to urban areas.

We planted fruit trees on a meagre 0.6 hectares of ground. However, the fruits didn't bring in much money when we sold them. Since we lacked the resources to invest in farming, we also had less successful harvests than others did. Because other families had access to more farmland and resources to spend in their farming, their living conditions were better than our family's. As a result, their crops were better. However, because of our family's financial situation, we were unable to purchase fertilizers to enhance our soil and had limited farmland. We were frightened of getting into debt, therefore we didn't dare borrow money to achieve this. We eventually just moved to earn enough money to survive.

Data also shows that, sometimes, some other family members, specially the spouse or children accompany the migrant and start living in the urban area. For example, one of the participants said,

Before I migrated to this City, life in our native village was generally quite hard and impoverished; there wasn't any job to be done there. I came to this city with other members of my family to work as a mason coolie. I had absolutely no work to do in the home village; there was nothing I could do, and we lacked the resources to start a modest business.

In some cases, spouse and children are left behind in the village or sent to different places for their survival. It has been seen that even after migration, the migrants are unable to earn enough money to support the other family members dependent on him/ her. As a result, poverty becomes a constant companion of the migrants and their dreams of a better life get shattered. It happens to the migrants because most of them do not have proper education or work skill to adapt to the advanced or skilled based work environment in the rural areas. As a result, governments around the world are trying to reduce the rural to urban migration rate. The 2013 World Population Policies report states that, "among 185 countries with available data in 2013, 80 per cent of governments had policies to lower rural to urban migration, an increase from 38 per cent in 1996" (UN DESA, 2013).

Sometimes the unchanged economic condition of the migrants forces them to go back to their village residence and again they face the previous miserable life experience for which they had to leave their home. Sometimes they again move to some other places for better life but failure continues and their fate remain unchanged. So, they become constant migrant for the search of livelihood. So, in one hand, poverty causes migration and in other hand, migration causes continuous poverty. One of the participants remarked regarding this;

Due to poverty, I moved to Dhaka. However, initially, I struggled to manage any paid work for myself and started sleeping on footpaths. Even after months, I was unable to earn enough to support my family back home. My children's mother was working as a maid servant at others house and survived at a hand to mouth condition.

This situation leads to a poor family bondage. Children remain disconnected from other family members for a long period of time and their balanced physical and psychological growth become uncertain. Statistics made by U.S. Census Bureau (2008) shows that around twenty percent children of near eighteen years suffer from poverty. It indicates that a great number of children suffer from poverty and other serious impact of poverty leading to very complex life hampering issues (Bennett, 2008). The migrants' children's education is also interrupted because of the poverty of their parents. Children with poor social and economic background cannot perform well in academic arena in most of the cases (Beegle, 2003). The long time detachment from the family members has also deep impact on the moral development of the children and ultimately a broken family or society is produced. Proper education of the children cannot be ensured in this type of situation. The poverty stricken family head cannot supply or ensure continuous and steady monetary support for their children's education. Consequently the new generation of the migrants seems to face the same fate of low education and improper work skill and lack of morality leading the generation to the same condition of their ancestor. Thus generation to generation, poverty continues and the impacts get worse day by day. Due to the continuous poverty, health issues cannot be maintained properly and especially the children suffer much. If the children are sick, parents cannot ensure proper treatment or Medicare for them due to their poverty. The children remain untreated hampering their regular education and normal physical growth. So, it is a common scenario there that uneducated people are not aware of health issues and they are the victim of serious diseases leading to death even

(Soundarapandian, 2000:80). Thus the interrelation of the effects of poverty causes a complex chain of troubles which have profound impact on the living standard.

The analysis shows that due to the poor economic condition of the migrants, they cannot buy nutritious food for their children, family members and for themselves even. As a result, the poor health condition remains unchanged and cause a vulnerable unproductive generation leading to further poverty. Sometimes, the migrants' health get deteriorated and they face serious sickness forcing them to be absent in their regular earning activities and they fell in further financial crisis. It becomes very difficult for the migrants to come out of this complex circle of poverty and their life standard remain critically vulnerable. When people does not have enough healthcare opportunity they slowly enter into the physically vulnerable condition leading to less capable for work resulting in poverty (Moore 2009). Besides, long time detachment from their sex partners have undeniable impact on their sexual life. It also causes mental depression or the feeling of deprivation and they head to psychological disorder which may cause abnormality and lack of motivation and inspiration toward work and family life. Financial insecurity causes constant mobility of accommodation of the migrants. They frequently change their living place because of financial instability. It is really a great challenge for the homeless or unstable people to get better job and salary (NEF, 2008; Singh, 2005). This can cause a loose social relationship as well as family relationship to the migrants. Parents and other family members of the migrants sometimes do not get proper information of them for their constant movement of accommodation from one place to another. So, it can be said that migration does not bring financial development always rather it causes several complexity in the life of the migrants. Poverty forces them to move from one place to another and the continuous unintentional and unplanned movement also cause poverty. This can be termed as a vise-versa situation.

VI CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion of the different sections of the study, it can be summarized that as a constant problem, poverty has presented complex challenges to societies impacting the standard of life from different perspectives including personal, familial, economic, social, physical and psychological phenomena. Though migration is considered as one of the solutions toward reducing poverty having better income, it is explored that this is not true always. Even, migration might be one of the causes of poverty. So, there is a very crucial but obvious connection among poverty, life standard and migration all over the world and Bangladesh is not an exception.

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