Bright City Lights and Slums of Dhaka city: Determinants of rural-urban migration in Bangladesh

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Abstract

This paper explores the factors contributing to the migration process in Bangladesh. 197 randomly selected migrants and their families were interviewed at both destination and source locations using closed and open-ended questionnaires. The resulting data provided descriptive and analytical statistics. Data analysis reveals that the flow of migration to the major cities in Bangladesh is the result of rural - urban dichotomies in income, employment opportunity and absorptive capacity. A significantly higher percentage of migrants live in slums as compared to other places (P<0.003). Regression analysis shows that migration is influenced by both "push" and "pull" factors, such as the search for work, landlessness, extreme poverty, loss of income,, easy access to informal sectors in cities, and joining families or relatives. A factor analysis showed similar determinants. Reducing disparities between rural and urban areas should receive urgent attention to stabilise the migration process in Bangladesh.

Key words: Migration, rural-urban convergence, slums, squatters

Introduction

'Gram sarsi bohut din hoise [*I left my village long ago*]' is a common response by migrants to the question 'When did you come to the city?' Migration between urban and rural areas is seen as a central element in the livelihoods of many

households in Bangladesh (Haan, 1999). Much of the literature focuses on movements of people as a result of environmental, economic or demographic crises. The rapid growth of rural-urban migration has been a common feature of developing countries. In China, for instance, Wang *et al* (2000) identified the magnitude of the floating population in cities caused by rural-urban migration and the consequences of the tidal wave of migrants. In Bangladesh, too, migration flows to major cities have alarmed observers. Rural-urban migration flows increased dramatically during the famine of 1974 (BBS, 1996). As a consequence, the share of rural migrants as a share of the urban population rose to 8.9% from 5.2% in 1961. A distinct selectivity with respect to age, sex, caste, marital status, education and occupation is evident in rural - urban migration (Millington, 2000). Of 491 urban locations in Bangladesh, only the four largest cities (Dhaka, Rajshahi, Chittagong and Khulna) are officially recognized as metropolitan cities. About 22% of the 129 million people in Bangladesh live in urban areas. The level of urbanization in Bangladesh is comparatively low, but the pace is high, ranging from 7 to 11% in the last five decades (Islam 1996a). During the decade from 1951, the total urban population rose from 1.8 to 2.6 million. The factors responsible for this form of growth were the large scale migration of Muslims from India after Partition in 1947, and the development of new centres of trade, commerce, industry and administration in the region after the formation of Bangladesh in 1971 (Islam, 1996b; *Daily Ittefaq*, 1999).

Migration is broadly defined as a relocation of residence for a specified duration and various reasons (Hossain, 2001), but it dominates the domain of

planning since it changes the lives of migrants' families both at the place of origin and destination. Rural-urban migration is a response to the high demand of labour by an industrial sector, which assures for workers greater levels of productivity and, for investors, profits superior to the opportunities found in the traditional agricultural sector (Lewis, 1954; Ranis and Fei 1961). Rural regions are over populated relative to the ability to feed themselves. Labour productivity is low, approaching zero, resulting in a subsistence level of production and providing incentives for migration to the cities. For Todaro (1969) and Harris and Todaro (1970), rural-urban migration in less developed countries depends on the difference in expected wage from migration (urban wage) versus an agricultural wage. The expected wage is equivalent to the actual industrial wage weighted by the probability of a migrant obtaining a job in the modern urban sector. Hence, rural-urban migration can coexist with high levels of urban unemployment. Johnson (1971) introduced to the Harris-Todaro model a "wage sharing" variable to take into account urban unemployment and a lower rate of job turn over. Gugler and Flanagan (1978), Fields (1975), and Kelly and William (1984) suggested an inclusion in the Harris-Todaro model of the differential access to information for rural workers and urban residents, the cost of living, and education levels when computing the probability of a migrant securing an urban job. Corden and Findlay (1975) focused on capital mobility (i.e., workers moving to places where capital is more productive) as a major determinant of labour migration. In general, all the authors agreed on the basic Todaro hypothesis that wage differentials guide rural-urban migration.

Many theoretical models thus provide an explanation for migration flows. In the Todaro-Harris model, the decision to migrate is largely determined by the individual's expectation of earning a higher income, with expected income being defined as actual urban income multiplied by the probability of obtaining employment. The Bicoa model introduces the concept of a 'reservation wage', defined as the expected rural income plus the opportunity cost of moving. The latter includes the transportation costs required for job seeking and the psychological ones associated with moving. If the expected urban income exceeds the reservation wage, then the individual will be motivated to leave the rural area. However, both models explain migration propensity as the result of income and employment in rural and urban areas.

However, migration is not unitary. It differs from fertility and mortality in that it cannot be analysed, even primarily, as transcending cultural or physiological factors, but must be differentiated even at the most abstract level with the social conditions obtaining. This means that the most general statement that one can make concerning migration must be in the form of a typology, rather than a law (Petersen, 1978). Petersen's typology divides migration into five classes: primitive, impelled, forced, free, and mass. Each class is subdivided into two types; conservative migration, in which the migrant changes residence to maintain his present standard of living, and innovative migration, where the move is made in order to improve living standards. Economic migrants are those who move from one place of work and residence to another, either within a country or across international boundaries,

primarily because of their economic opportunities, as distinct from refugees and those who move because of migration decisions of others (tied movers) (Chiswick, 2000). Migration is explained by the law of demand and supply. The varying returns on investment in different areas leads to capital mobility, which results in the adjustment of prices and the development of economically less-developed areas (Nikolinakos, 1996).

Rapid population growth fragments rural landholdings accompanied by low cropping intensity and low yields thus creating surplus labour. An overpopulated rural subsistence economy characterized by zero marginal labour productivity is classified by Lewis as surplus labour (Todaro, 1985). A dearth of required functions in rural communities, such as educational functions (i.e., schools) triggered about 23% of migrants to move to the city in Bangladesh (*Bangladesh Observer*, 1999). Developing countries that face urban unemployment and poverty mainly due to high rural-urban migration rates, have tried to solve the problem by employing three types of policy. First, a shadow pricing policy attempts to equate marginal rates of substitution in consumption in both sectors by granting wage subsidies to urban firms that agree to reduce the wage, paid to their workers, to the rural wage level (Harris-Todaro, 1970; Sabot, 1979). This policy is equivalent to giving production subsidies to the agricultural sector in order to equate the marginal rate of production in both sectors (Baghwati and Srinivasan, 1974). Second, restricting the flow of labour migration to cities had been applied in many LDCs, but with only short term positive results. This policy also raises questions concerning civil liberties. Finally attempts have been

made to implement labour intensive projects in cities to reduce urban unemployment and poverty. These have only led to more rural-urban migration because rural workers interpreted them as signals of higher probabilities of obtaining urban jobs (Todaro 1969).

Economic theory and empirical research shows that the foundation of rural-urban migration is the excess of the urban wage over the rural wage. Even migration determinants such as distance, age and contacts only reflect the fact that wage and productivity disparities exist. Migration produces inflows of remittances and offers an outlet for frustrated unemployed workers who might otherwise present serious domestic problems. The prevalence of household violence remains the major issue in slums. Polygamy, divorce, beatings, abandonment, physical and mental torture, use of abusive language, dowry pressure, threats to remarry, and violent quarrels over trifling matters are quite prevalent. Women often received death rewards from their husbands (Simon, 1997). Apart from social, cultural and financial impacts, migration by an individual produces demographic impacts as well. The physical separation of husbands and wives as a result of migration gives the female partner less scope for conception, which results in low fertility among migrant households (Hossain, 2001). Migration to Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh, is the main focus of this paper, which explores the factors affecting migration and examines where migrants end up.

Methods

Data used for this paper were collected using a questionnaire survey administered during January-February 2003 in two villages in the Dinajpur district of northern Bangladesh. Both close and open ended questions were used. To ensure a representative sample size, a standard technique was employed. A sample of 197 families who had moved to the cities was interviewed. With a view to gaining qualitative information two sessions of focus group discussions were conducted. Six experienced interviewers were recruited for data collection. They were trained for seven days on the specific work site setting and variables. To ensure quality data, a supervisor was recruited to help solve any difficulties arising during field work.

Descriptive and inferential statistics were analysed. Regression analysis has been employed to determine the potential variables affecting migration. The major research question is 'Are rural people pushed towards or pulled into cities?' To answer it, a factor analysis was applied to obtain a list of determinants affecting rural-urban migration (and to validate the push-pull theory). SPSS was used for all analysis.

Potential determinants

Work in the informal sector has a potential role in influencing rural - urban migration. More than five million people are involved in informal sector occupations in Dhaka city (Islam, 1996a). The flow of migration to urban setting has continued to grow. Workers employed in the informal sector increased by about 8% from the

1970s to 1980s. The overwhelming concentration of wealth, assets, purchasing power, economic activities and variety of services tend to support a continuous influx of migration. Many migrants make their living in the informal sector. In 1988, there were more than 500,000 rickshaw-pullers in Dhaka; a number that had increased to about 900,000 by the year 2002. Accessibility to some informal sectors exposes migrants to police harassment and gives rise to unplanned urban growth, but this figure in 1974 was only 40,000 (Amin, 1995; Ullah, Rahman and Murshed, 1999). Nearly 11% of the respondents claimed the informal sectors as one of the strongest pull factors.

Rural–urban dichotomies in higher income probability, education, density of population and service facilities are some of the most significant determinants influencing migration. The rural areas of Bangladesh are at the bottom of the spatial tier (Amin, 1994), where around only 15% of households have been brought under electrification and 92% of the roads are earthen (Ahmed, 1999). The operation of economic forces set in motion by economic growth and development in urban areas helps drain resources from rural areas.

The regression analysis

Both the qualitative sessions and questionnaire survey revealed a number of factors that encouraged migrants to move to the city.

f_1 Failure to repay NGO loan
f_2 Searching for work
f_3 Escape conviction
f_4 Better livelihood (extreme poverty)
f_5 Homelessness
f_6 Landlessness
f_7 Threatened by opposition
f_8 River erosion
f_9 Natural disaster
f_{10} Conviction/got-up cases
f_{11} Marital factors (divorce, newly married, etc)
f_{12} Loosened family bondage
f_{13} Too many family members
f_{14} Deprived of hereditary rights
f_{15} Oppressed
f_{16} Loss/death of guardian
f_{17} Loss of income sources
f_{18} Escape village enemy
f_{19} Easy access to informal sector
f_{20} Easy access to slum areas
f_{21} Positive information about the city (garment factory jobs, etc)
f_{22} Higher income probability
f_{23} Better service facilities
f_{24} Relatives/joining families
f_{25} Fast life in city
f_{26} Do not like village/no electricity

Determinants with comparatively higher frequencies were included in this model. The following determinants are highly correlated with the dependent variable 'migration', and help minimize the number of factors that show potential determinants. Factors entered into the final model are f_1: failure to repay NGO loan (0.312); f_2: searching for work (0.409); f_4: better livelihood (extreme poverty) (3.557); f_6: landlessness (0.491); f_{11}: marital factors (divorce, newly married, etc) (0.301); f_{17}: loss of income sources (0.344); f_{19}: easy access to informal sector (0.389); f_{24}: relatives/joining families (0.355). The variables with a correlation coefficient smaller than 0.03 or $R^2 < 0.09$ were removed from the model to maximize the relation between the determinants (independent variables) and migration (dependent variable).

Table 1. Regression coefficients

Variables	Regression coefficients	Significance*
Constant	-898.032	

f_2	Searching for work	1.092	P<0.005
f_4	Better livelihood (extreme poverty)	3.557	P<0.000
f_6	Landlessness	2.775	P<0.004
f_{17}	Loss of income sources	3.005	P<0.000
f_{19}	Easy access to informal sector	2.085	P<0.000
f_{24}	Joining relatives/families	1.008	P<0.007

Source: Computed from survey data, 2003.

*significant at 95% confidence level

$Y=-898.032+1.092* f_2 +3.557*f_4 +2.775* f_6 +3.005* f_{17} +2.085* f_{19} +1.008* f_{24}$

The R^2 value 0.778 shows the usefulness of this model in analysing the determinants that influence the migration process potentially and, hence, rural–urban migration is explained by five factors; searching of work, landlessness, loss of income sources, easy access to informal sector, and relatives/joining families.

Bangladesh is frequently exposed to multiple forms of natural disaster, and experts blame its geographical location and ecological hazards. Cyclones in 1970 and 1991 killed 300,000 and 170,000 respectively (UNICEF, 1999). People in Bangladesh live in a state of anxiety due to an inability to cope with such disasters, which is a significant push factor. They are gradually demoralized and refuse to remain in areas where fighting with nature is a losing battle. About 5% of respondents had left their rural homestead due to natural disasters. As mentioned above, Bangladesh experienced an upsurge in migration flows during the famine of 1974, when the highest average annual population growth rate (138%) was recorded for Dhaka (BBS, 1984). This influx continued in the mid 1980s when the city experienced a rapid increase in ready made garment (RMG) factories. The phenomenal growth in export

oriented RMG factories from an insignificant level in 1975-80 to 54.3% of merchandize exports in 1990-93, contributed largely to urban growth (Afsar, 1999). About 1,100 RMGs in Dhaka employed more than 400,000 skilled and unskilled workers. Around 8% of migrants were influenced by information about obtaining a job in the RMG sector to move to the city. The Center for Urban Studies (CUS) showed 63% of migrants acquired information about Dhaka through their friends and relatives who lived in city (Islam, 1996c) and this information influenced the migration process.

Rapid urban growth causes economic, social and cultural improvements for some people but also a deterioration in the overall urban environment and a very low standard of living for the very large number who constitute the poor (Simon, 1999). Data revealed that a large number of migrant families living in slums and squatters moved to the cities due to the urge for a better livelihood. The survey revealed a number of factors (got-up cases, family feuds, deprivation of hereditary rights, and demise of guardians) drove many to the city. A large number of riverbank people migrated to the city after their homesteads were eroded away by the river. The regression analysis offers the same idea about push or pull factors influenced their decision to move.

A few polygamous adults and a number of female migrants stated their decision to migrate was caused by their husbands that were either idle, blind, crippled, drunkards, thieves, immoral, extremely poor or sometimes violent. *'PEST'*

factors (political, economic, social and technological) meant people were more likely to migrate. The abolition of a food rationing system significantly accelerated this process too, a Wang *et al*, (2000) show for China. War-ravaged Bangladeshis had received basic food rationing from the government up to 1989. However, this study has found no evidence that this is a significant factor. Social scientists argue that loosening family bondage plays a role in the process of determining whether a temporary migrant will become a permanent one.

Controversies over internal migration in developing counties have revolved around the Todaro model (Wang *et al,* 2000), which assumes that the urban informal sector is the pull factor (where rural to urban migrants first seek employment opportunities and where they remain underemployed or unemployed until they can find employment in the urban formal sector). This model fits well with stylized facts in the urban labour market such as the large rural-urban wage gap, high unemployment rate, and rapidly growing informal sectors. These facts are more evident where factors like income elasticity demand, price elasticity of demand, market competition, economies of scale, external economies, terms of trade, capital accumulation and technological innovation point to the inherent advantages of the urban industrial sector and inherent disadvantages of the rural agricultural sector (Amin, 1994). The propensity of migration is influenced by a combination of push-pull factors. Urban bias is held responsible for rural-urban migration (Haan, 1999). Because of the overwhelming concentration of wealth, assets, purchasing capacity, economic activities and variety of services in the urban centres in general and the

largest metropolis in particular, continuous migration flows take place beginning from those who can survive in these centres even without any formal sector jobs. Poverty is not the only factor pushing people towards the cities, but attraction factors pull them too. Islam (1996a) and Siddiqui (1993) describe these attraction factors as illegal power and water supplies, colourfulness of the city, willingness to change and see new places, and so on, while Todaro termed them as 'bright city lights'. This theory is supported by about 6% of the respondents; i.e., bright city lights were an influential factor in them moving to the city.

Factor Analysis

The basic push-pull model for migration behaviour drawn from classical economic theory is closely related to the theory of the labour market. In its initial form, the model assumes that equilibrium will be maintained in wage rates because migration will balance out differentials caused by the advantages of different employment locations (Jackson, 1986). Factors determining migration have been extracted through factor analysis. The determinants of migration to the city are characterized by two major categories: one is 'pull' and the other is 'push'. The cumulative percentage of the variances of these factors is 69.1. This implies that the determinants could reasonably be sufficient to explain migration. Push factors alone have accounted for approximately two thirds of the total variances. Push factors explaining 51.6% of the total variance mean it is the most powerful factor in determining migration. This is represented as a positive correlation (factor loadings)

with f_1, f_2, f_4, f_5, f_6, f_7, f_9, f_{11}, and f_{17}. This factor is a push factor based on the loadings.

Table 2 Push factor

Variable*	Factor loadings
f_1 Failure to repay NGO loan	.71126
f_2 Search of work	.92133
f_4 Better livelihood (extreme poverty)	.87694
f_5 Homelessness	.73891
f_6 Landlessness	.88371
f_7 Threatened by opposition	.63314
f_9 Natural disaster	.79981
f_{11} Marital factors (divorce, newly married, etc)	.69933
f_{17} Loss of income sources	.51922
% Variance	51.6
Eigenvalue	7.397

*% of respondents

Source: Computed from survey data, 2003

Pull factors account for 17.5% of all variances and are positively correlated with variables f_1: easy access to informal sector; f_3: positive information about the city; f_4: higher income probability; f_6: joining relatives/families. Variables with high factor loadings denote the influential determinants of migration. The findings here are similar to the regression analysis. Among pull factors, 'high income probability' is the second highest factor loading, which supports the Todaro model of wage differentials between rural and urban areas as a factor in migration.

Table 3 Pull factors

Variable	Factor loadings
f_{19} Easy access to informal sector	.61406
F_{21} Positive information on the city (many RMG factories, etc)	.46525
F_{22} Higher income probability	.76114
F_{24} Joining relatives/families	.88211
% of Variance	17.5
Eigenvalue	2.903

*% of respondents

Source: Computed from survey data, 2003

Slums: the final destination

The link between migration and slums has been of concern to development planners since it has become apparent that the majority of Asia's population (56%) will be living in urban areas by the year 2020 (Islam, 1996). The adverse consequence of migration is evident in Dhaka, where about 40% of the total population lives in slum areas. Slums are residential areas of very high population density, high room density (three or more adults in one room), and poor housing with inadequate access to basic civic amenities. They are often built on land devoid of municipal holding numbers. Inhabitants rent from powerful people who have illegally occupied vacant public lands (Siddiqui, 1993). Slums are areas and communities of very high density (>300 persons/acre), and housing (generally shacks, cutcha houses (earthen structures), semi-pucca houses (built partially of concrete), flimsy structures, or very old dilapidated buildings). Very poor people who are mostly engaged in the informal sector inhabit such areas (Islam, 1996b).

According to various sources, there were between 1,125 slums housing 2.3 million people in 1991 (Islam, 1996c) and 4,000 slums housing 3.6 million people and occupying 1,089 acres of land. The density of population doubled between 1974 and 1990 (Islam, 1996b). Lloyd (1979) found 94% of slum dwellers in Dhaka were from rural areas, while Majumder (1996) and Qadir (1975) put the figure at 93%. However, not all migrants are fortunate enough to find accommodation in slums.

Most of them begin by squatting and gradually try to accommodate themselves in slums; finding a place is difficult without family connections in slums.

Table 4 Destinations of migrants

Destination	%	Significance*
Slums	78	
Category 1**	11	P<0.004 (cat 1 vs cat 2, vs cat 3)
Category 2	24	
Category 3	43	
Squats	13	P<0.003 (slums vs squatters vs others)
Others	9	
Total	100.00	

Source: Computed from survey data, 2003

*Significant at 95% confidence level

**Category 1: Bamboo and straw with reasonably high roof

Category 2: Bamboo/wood and polythene paper (crouch down to enter)

Category 3: Makeshift (polythene paper and rope). (crouch down to enter)

Others : Mess, relatives' house, etc.

Data show that a significantly higher percentage of migrants (78%) (P<0.003) live in slums as compared to those living in squats, despite easier access to squats in the cities (although squats afford less permanence). Again a significantly lower percentage (11%) of migrants landed in the class one category of slums as compared to those live in lowest category slums (P<0.000) (43%). Data reinforce that almost all migrants from rural poor families end up in slums.

Concluding remarks

People will try to take avail themselves of economic opportunities. Hence, the existing policy in Bangladesh relating to migration suggests the government should promote economic activities in rural areas and adopt a balanced development strategy to encourage settlements and other functions in small and intermediate cities. The government's policy of rural development and poverty alleviation (along with activities by non-government agencies) has failed to arrest out-migration from rural areas. Policies that operate only on the demand side of the employment picture are probably far less effective in the long run in alleviating the unemployment problem than are policies designed to slow down the surplus of labour to urban areas.

Apart from the many 'push' factors, 'pull' factors draw people from rural to urban environments. Approximately three migrants compete for every job created in an urban area. Migrants living in subhuman conditions gradually become permanent parasites in urban areas. Here, percolation of service provisions, infrastructural development, and relocating industry to rural areas might reduce the propensity of migration. Hence, rural-urban convergence is very significant for a balanced spatial distribution. An appropriate balance between rural and urban economic opportunities through the spread of small scale industries throughout the countryside and the reorientation of economic activities and social investments towards raising incomes in rural Bangladesh would appear to be good tools to discourage rural–urban migration.

Collaboration between NGOs, the private sector and the government could enhance productivity and income levels of the rural poor.

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