



Emerging Challenges and Impact of Climate Change and Migration: through the Gender Lens in Bangladesh

Background

Gender Equality (SDG 5), forms a crucial part of the global development agenda. In this part of the world, though, women are twice exceptional because at the household level and at the community level, they struggle: for the reason that persistent and emerging gender challenges obstruct their paths to growth and development. Disparities in education and health services (like safety and security of adolescent girls; access to quality education, health care to safeguard from life threatening communicable virus) need urgent attention. Various types of gender intervention or approaches to gender equality – have been employed to address these key gender challenges. It is an accepted intervention that women's labour force participation must be ensured through collective action, albeit the returns often do not accrue to women themselves and their children, as they are prone to exploitation. Also, it is imperative to secure women's voice and agency in this patriarchal society, because most poor women, culturally inhibited and shy, lack the wherewithal to articulate their needs, despite being development catalysts within each household. Their roles are related to critical needs, though simple but critical, such as household water and sanitation, food security and bio-mass collection, agriculture support and also

in collection of forest resources etc. With the new challenges imposed by Climate Change, and escalating structural conditions that are at best, inimical for the poor, women's lack of control over basic assets is causing intensified gendered inequities.

This policy brief has been prepared under the auspices of DECCMA. Deltas are home to a massive population and often, susceptible to inundation due to their low-lying nature.

Due to global climate change, more and more people are taking up migration as an adaptation strategy. Mass migration is often characterized by irrecoverable damage of livelihood resources, livestock and life support systems by extreme climatic conditions. By 2050, it is estimated that over 35 million will be displaced in Bangladesh as a result of climate change – and this will lead to increased internal and external migration (DSK, 2012).

Projections show that climate-related challenges will be on the rise – flooding, intense cyclones, rising sea-levels and overall rise in temperature. Although the poverty-stricken population has been steadily on the decline, and despite recent economic growth and prosperity, climate projections indicate that high levels of local vulnerability are likely to remain and persist (Schellnhuber, 2013).

Objectives

This DECCMA paper aims to understand the effectiveness of adaptation options, gendered barriers as well as limitations in implementation, the role of migration under climate change situations and the particular constraints of women, which render them peculiarly vulnerable, despite programs of amelioration, adopted in Bangladesh.

Methodology

Methodologically, this paper has built upon a synthesis of secondary literature and validated findings from nineteen in-depth key informant interviews of stakeholders in May 2016, under the auspices of a global study titled, "DECCMA", which probed four deltas of the world. This study has analyzed the information from the largest delta, the Ganga-Brahmaputra portion in Bangladesh, through a gender lens.

Key findings

Empirical information culled from survey of 2016 on 1500 households (DECCMA Survey) affected by low-lying elevation delves into the situation of migrant and non-migrant families. Enquiry into their state, both real and perceived, shows that stress affects women considerably. Study probes material and subjective wellbeing of migrant and non-migrant households who are facing different types of climatic stresses. In trying to understand whether migration plays any role in increasing or decreasing wellbeing of the affected households and how gender plays a pivotal role, it is seen that material well-being is enhanced for the family in general but subjective well-being is lowered as women become isolated and chores increase. Quality of life of women, their roles in managing household welfare, food security, health and sanitation, precarious lives in times of water-logging etc. often become onerous. Well-being is

loosely defined here as a satisfactory condition of existence which includes material conditions as well as subjective state of mind. Subjective element of well-being depends on characteristic of individual's as well as his/her own perception and evaluation of the reality. Objective element of wellbeing does not depend on evaluation of individuals about him/herself, rather it only includes the material and non-material resources of the person. Findings show that: (a) Quality of life was not only related to happiness but also to values and aspirations, that are equally important to people. Thus, studies often relate to the theme of the importance of people's capabilities and more importantly whether they are embedded in enabling or disabling relationships. (b) the households face insecurity because of continuous and sustained erosion of assets in origin areas and recouping loss is not ensured in destination areas. Addressing their problems requires commitment;

Gendered patterns of male migration continue to predominate, often imposing new roles on the female-headed households. Gender roles and relations govern socially and culturally appropriate and expected performance of men and women, but there has been little investigation to elaborate whether migration improves or reduces the well-being of women left behind. In a survey of 1386 households (DECCMA Survey 2016), women in migrant households were asked to consider the effect of migration on their decision-making capacity (in various domains), work responsibilities, personal safety, and subjective well-being. Women are avoiding disaster shelters on account of lack of privacy. This society looks down upon women who spend the night, despite inclement weather conditions, with other people who are not closely related to them. The property they own is also to be guarded. Hence, women opt to safeguard their reputation in the community, and to remain in their own homesteads, even at the risk of losing their lives.

Thus, empirical evidence suggests that women, more than men, are severely affected (eg. postpartum suffering, pre-mature and still births, abortion, hypertension etc.), by post-disaster conditions involving, for example, increased exposure to salinity. Case studies show that 16% men took money from women; 17% men migrated to international destinations and another 17% migrated internally and 50% women felt insecure due to the absence of men in their households. They also voiced their needs in terms of policy assistance from Government (14%), and government assisted infrastructure (20%). Women in disaster affected areas said that they require community support (17%); social service

(39%) and individual initiatives (10%) to overcome their dilemma (DECCMA Qualitative Survey 2016).

Survey of 19 In-depth Interview conducted for DECCMA, presented the Bangladesh Case Study of un-addressed relocation crisis of affected population (s): a view that specifically relates to climate change and gender issues and the various successes and failures of existing policies. An inspection of the unresolved situation is delineated, to present policy recommendations that need to be immediately addressed. The lacunae in policy and lack-lustre implementation of government; the minimal benefits to abject poor and resultant infringement of rights of people has now been documented. Findings are given below:

- The country has several policies, but limited examples of successfully implemented planned relocation;
- Challenges associated are:
- difficult transitions and unfair identification and compensations;
- Limited community involvement and consultation;
- “The GoB has a clear policy of resettling landless people on ‘Khas land’”: but “GoB has only recent policy (s) regarding climate displacement. Climate Change governance is still new, and there is a huge lapse in law and practice.” (DECCMA Qualitative Survey, 2016). Most respondents say that they are losing their lands and resources every day; Floods, riverbank, tidal surge, salinity and most important landlessness and unemployment;
- “Normally the resettlement that is happening is forced resettlement – either by society or community or due to climate issues”; “lot of money invested in coastal embankment, but GoB is totally unprepared to deal with mass movement from coastal area to Dhaka”.

Field level information reveals that with the building of disaster shelters, people are safer now, but the bad news is that they still face growing uncertainties with regard to income as their land is inundated for long periods.

Resettlement has not achieved the desired goal as resettled people are not satisfied with infrastructure facilities or the lack of government support for livelihood transition. One respondent asked us, “Have you come to dislocate us again... the last time they came (G) they moved us and now we have become homeless, suffering.....you will not listen to us!”

Successful resettlement requires relocation of a community where work can be secured (either through employment or developing enterprises) and where there are better opportunities for social services. This requires infrastructural initiatives

(especially housing), which should be in line with Planned intervention, such as the “Cluster Village” model (PRSP I and II 2008 and 2010; PMO office 2015-2016). So that economic, social, and cultural integration of the re-settlers is given priority in long-term resettlement planning decisions; and more

efficient communication and coordination between the government and development partners. Cluster Villages are not resettlement as such, rather "safe settlements" for poor people (they can take their homes and belongings in boats) for a period of around 6 months until the water subsides.

Policy Implications

- Sudden and slow onset environmental hazards impact vulnerability of people in different ways, and women and children need to be addressed specifically;
- Voluntary and involuntary relocation is one of the outcomes (Cernea 1997, Warner et al. 2010); Policies must be sensitive to cater to needs accordingly;
- Limited anticipatory planning: women, children, elderly and disabled may become trapped and exposed to impoverishment and increased vulnerability at far higher levels;
- As disaster victims have no acceptable livelihood in their established homelands, planning lives and livelihoods in new ; Lack of rights-based national plan to assist people directly impacted by climate change and other environmental hazards, require attention;
- Government schemes such as the village cluster model should be explored for potential application to climate displaced people;
- The use of community land trusts should be encouraged;
- Emergency and regular relocation programmes should be mainstreamed and accessible;
- Land acquisition and land (set aside) projects should begin immediately;
- A rights-based national plan to resolve climate displacement should be developed.

Climate change disasters are mostly addressed topographically, but there are not enough studies at the community level. For the same climatic event, different communities are affected in different ways. At the lower levels, there is a knowledge-gap and general lack of awareness regarding the impending effects of climate change. Building awareness of disasters and preparedness is a primary requirement. More important is to garner support for inclusion of women who are simultaneously dependent and symbiotically linked. On one hand they are utilizing forest resources, while on the other, they are also nurturing common resources, depending on fuel-wood and fruit trees. The need for a greener environment can only be effectively addressed if

women participate fully. Urbanization, land-use policy, economic exigencies, all solicit a more enabling and gendered activity that is conducive to the cogent solicitation of women’s participation. The waste management in rural and urban areas, if partnered with women, could lead to better lives and livelihoods, as well as create the nexus with a sustainable ecology.

The case studies (DECCMA 2016: Qualitative Study) present in-sights on the situation of women who are faced with challenges that are not merely economic, but also social, psychological, physical (VAW), legal, governance (law and order, security), environmental and related to aspirations, as well.

The challenges associated with climate displacement and migration, appears to persist at the social level, and a form of stigma exists, that is associated with the displaced people. Inability to cope with new livelihoods adds to the challenges that they face. Capacity building is essential to not only help the communities cope and adapt, but also to shape development processes. Raising awareness of climate change can encourage people to diversify their livelihood opportunities, so that climate change victims can have alternative ways to make a living in addition to home-making, and the chores of women could be made less challenging. Community support and encouragement for weaker groups and the enabling conditions that could be created for women, should form part of the awareness building. All needs can then be assessed and sustainable future programs can be designed for the greater good. These programs need to be region-specific and cater to particular communities and societal needs.

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