



Migration objectives and their fulfillment: A micro study of the rural-urban migrants of the slums of Dhaka city

Asif Ishtiaque¹, Mallik Sezan Mahmud¹

¹Department of Geography and Environment, Faculty of Earth and Environmental Sciences, University of Dhaka, Dhaka - 1000 Bangladesh

Correspondence: Asif Ishtiaque (email: asif_ishti@yahoo.com)

Abstract

Rural-Urban migration plays an important role in poverty reduction and economic development. In Bangladesh rural-urban migration is the most important factor for rapid urbanization with urban slums being a popular destination for poor rural-urban migrants. More than 15 million people live in the slums of six divisional cities of Bangladesh. Capital Dhaka alone contains about 3.4 million people in 4966 slums. Focusing on the two largest slums of Dhaka, the study reveals that predominantly migrants came from the northern and southern parts of the country and carried with them dreams of prosperity. This study evaluates the migration objectives, status and the fulfillment of their migration objectives based on a survey of 373 randomly selected temporary and permanent migrants. It was found that 82% of the migrants perceived that their migration objectives as had been either totally fulfilled or on the way of fulfillment. It was also discovered that although 68.10% of the migrants were satisfied with the socio- economic attainment of their migration objectives and wanted to come back to their place of origin after saving enough money, so that they could live the rest of their life out of poverty, they could not do so. The rural lack of earning opportunities did not permit them to reverse the rural-urban migration trend.

Keywords: Bangladesh, migration objectives fulfillment, migration status, place of origin, rural-urban migration, slums

Introduction

Rural-urban migration is a powerful symbol for regional inequality, in terms of economy, opportunities and living standards. It closes the gap between needs and gains. Several factors like economic crisis, lack of food, lack of job etc. push rural people to leave village. On the other hand several forces like the availability of jobs, easy access to informal economy etc. attract people to come to towns and cities. Rural-urban migrants carry with them the hope and dream of making their life better.

Bangladesh is facing rapid urbanization in recent years. And rural-urban migration in Bangladesh is the most important factor for urbanization. More than one-fourth of the total population is living in urban centres. Although the figure of one-fourth does not seem very large, given the huge population size of Bangladesh, this urban population is as big as the total population of Canada, Australia, Malaysia etc.

Rural-urban migration in Bangladesh is not a recent phenomenon. It started before Bangladesh became Bangladesh. Although rural-urban migration has started since the beginning of the 20th century as Dhaka became the administrative capital in 1906, the internal migration

within Bangladesh gained momentum during 1960s. After the liberation in 1971 rural-urban migration increased suddenly because of nation-wide famine. Lack of job opportunity also played a significant role during that time. People rushed into the towns and cities in search of food and employment. The famine was over but the rate of rural-urban migration is still increasing.

Bangladesh has 522 urban centres (BBS, 1991) where at present about 46.03 million people are living. The rural areas are the living place for 118.37 million people (UNFPA, 2010). The annual rate of the national population increase is 1.40% whereas the urban population growth rate is 3.20% (Population Reference Bureau, 2010). From 2000 to 2005, the contribution of natural increase of urban population was only 41.9% while that of rural-urban migration and redefinition of urban centres was about 58.1% . Since without doubt that the redefinition of urban centres contributed very little it can be said that rural-urban migration plays the most important role in Bangladeshi urbanization.

As rural people are generally poorer than urban people, many of them cannot afford the living expenses of urban residential areas. In that case they have to live in the slums. Actually most of the slums are composed of rural-urban migrants from various regions of the country. There are a total of 9048 slums in the six divisional cities of Bangladesh where about 15.45 million people live. In Dhaka city, the capital of Bangladesh alone, there are a total of 4966 slums and about 3.4 million people live in those slums, which is equivalent to nearly 40% of the total population of Dhaka city (CUS, 2005).

In slums the socio-environmental condition is execrable. Population density is far higher than the other parts of the city, the sanitation system is not well improved and there always remains a scarcity of pure drinking water in those slums. The population density of the slums of Dhaka city is 220,246 persons per square km while the non-slum population density is only 19,677 persons per square km (CUS, 2005). This tremendously high density of population makes the environment of the slums more than abominable but ironically many of the migrants chose to stay there. This paper deals with the status and migration objectives of the rural-urban migrants, the fulfillment of those migration objectives and the reason why they did not leave the city even after attaining them their dreams.

Methodology

Of Dhaka's 4966 slums of Dhaka city the two largest slums selected for the study were Korail slum and Baonia Badh –Pora Kalabagan slum. The questionnaire method was used to collect the migration information and the respondents were randomly sampled. A total of 373 respondents was selected for face to face inter-personal interviews. In some cases focus group approach was also conducted.

Findings

Origin of the migrants

Dhaka is the prime focus of Bangladesh. It is considered as the nucleus of the country. It is not surprising, therefore, that Dhaka is always the first choice for rural-urban migrants. Bangladesh consists of 64 districts wherein the two largest slums of Bangladesh have migrants from 40 districts. Comilla, Sherpur and Barisal are the top three districts from where rural-urban migrants predominantly come. Migrants come both from northern and southern Bangladesh. However, this

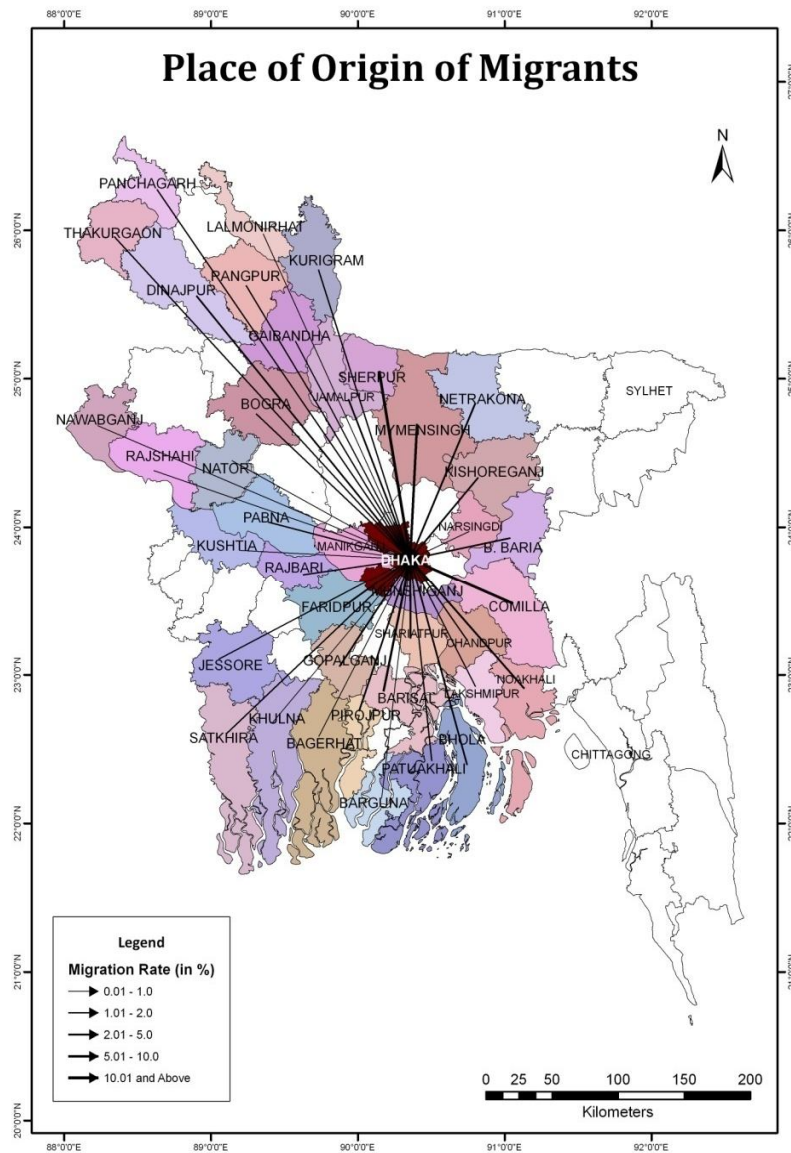


Figure 1. Place of origin of migrants

study found no migrants from southeastern hilly side of Bangladesh in Dhaka and this was mainly because of the drag of other urban centres there, especially Chittagong and Sylhet.

Chittagong is the second largest city of Bangladesh and is known as the 'port city'. Chittagong plays an important role in serving the rural-urban migrants of neighbouring districts. Sylhet is also a rich divisional city and it also serves its surrounding districts. That is why people of north-eastern and south-eastern districts generally feel no pull from Dhaka. In the case of the northern and southern parts, there are three big cities- Rajshahi, Khulna and Barisal. These cities lack employment opportunities and financial dynamism. For this reason people from their surrounding districts prefer to go to Dhaka than to them.

Migration objectives

“In village there is peace but no happiness, in city there is happiness but no peace. And in search of happiness we come to cities” said a rural-urban migrant. By ‘happiness’ he meant ‘financial affluence’. Actually in Bangladesh people enjoy rural life. They in general do not like the city rush, traffic and pollution, but they move to cities for food, money, job. They enter into the cities with some objectives, and in almost every case it is financial. The pictures of the two largest slums are same; the rural-urban migrants of these slums came to this megacity with a hope, with a belief that they would be more affluent than they were before.

Dhaka is the living place of 11.9 million people (BBS, 2011). Here, a huge number of people is involved with the informal economy of rickshaw pulling, hawkery, roadside business etc. This study has found that getting access to the informal economy, getting job or earning money was the predominant objectives of migrants coming to Dhaka. To about 21.5% of the respondents Dhaka meant taka, the Bangladeshi currency, meaning that they were willing to earn money in any way once residing in the city. To women migrants the aim was to get employed in Dhaka’s garment and leather factories (Table 1).

Table 1. Migration objectives of the migrants

Objectives	Frequency	%
Getting access to the city’s informal economy (i.e. rickshaw pulling, hawker)	115	30.83
To get any job	97	26.01
‘Dhaka means Taka’	80	21.45
Getting employed in factories (garments, leather etc)	62	16.62
Others	19	5.09
Total	373	100.00

Migration status

Because Dhaka meant livelihoods, financial survival and even economic betterment to the migrants it is not surprising that so many migrant slum-dwellers do not intent to leave Dhaka. Many of the respondents had plans to buy a piece of land at the suburb and reside there permanently. In their words, as they would not get any job or financial opportunity in the village anyway, there was nothing that will attract them to return to it. Although they had no intention to cut off their relationship with the village altogether they would rather treat revisiting it as an outing.

Nevertheless, the largest proportion of the migrant slum-dwellers perceived their migration to Dhaka a temporary adventure. They just wanted to make some or enough money in Dhaka and then to return to their villages. These were those who were emotionally attached to their villages for they were their birthplace.

Table 2. Migration status

Answer	Frequency	%
Temporary	195	52.28
Permanent	178	47.72
Total	373	100.00

Fulfillment of migration objectives

As indicated earlier, the migrants left their villages with specific socio-economic purposes to fulfill. Have they achieved those purposes? This study found that more than 69.17% of the migrants believed that their migration objectives had been totally fulfilled and another 13.40% perceived that the objectives were partially fulfilled or on the way of fulfillment. The remainder of 17.43% of the migrants admitted that they had or could not achieve their desired goals for migrating (Table 3).

Table 3. Migration objectives fulfillment of the migrants

Migration Objectives Fulfillment	Frequency	%
Yes	258	69.17
Partially	50	13.40
No	65	17.43
Total	373	100.00

Migrant satisfaction level

To help understand the migration objectives fulfillment more clearly, a question was asked during the survey of respondents' satisfaction with their present standard and condition of living compared to their previous life in the village. It was found that although the current standard and condition of living in the slum clearly was far from good, interestingly most of them (68.10%) professed that they were satisfied with it. Even the 23.32% who were not currently satisfied were hopeful to be satisfied in the near future. Still, there were those in the minority of about 1.07% who believed they had fulfilled their migration objectives fully but were not satisfied with their present status of life in the slums which means that they will stay longer in the city until they become fully satisfied.

Table 4. Satisfaction of migrants about present status of life

Satisfaction	Frequency	%
Yes	254	68.10
No	87	23.32
Don't Know	32	8.58
Total	373	100.00

Although most of the migrants had fulfilled their migration objectives, most of them did not leave the city yet. This happened mainly because of two reasons. Firstly, it was human nature that the more you get the more you want. For instance, a migrant came to the city after having financial crisis in the village and started to earn a good amount of money in city. He then bought pieces of lands and made houses in the village. In his opinion he had fulfilled his objectives but he had not any plan to leave the city. He wanted to earn as much more money as possible. Secondly, there was no way out for migrants to leave the city. His occupation did not permit him to leave and go back to the village. For example, a migrant experienced severe loss in business in the village and came to the city wherein he then did the same business and made a huge profit. He could not leave the city as the village lacked the threshold population needed for his business. Nevertheless, it is true that most of the migrants wanted to go back the village at the later stage of their life when they would have accumulated a really good amount of money.

Conclusion

Rural areas of Bangladesh lack opportunities. The migrants come to urban centres to fulfill their needs and desires which cannot be fulfilled in the rural areas. From the foregoing discussion it is evident that most of the rural-urban migrants were successful in fulfilling their migration objectives. In spite of this, however, they did not intend to return to the village. Strong urban pull factors kept the migrants from leaving the urban centres while weak pull factors of the country's rural failed to bring the migrants back to the village. Although most of the migrants wanted to come back to their place of origin after saving enough money, so that they could live the rest of their life out of poverty, they could not do so. Lack of earning opportunities did not permit them to reverse the rural-urban migration trend.

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