



CLIMATE CRISIS PAPER

ABSTRACT

This paper finds strong historical evidence that the triple mobility crisis (climate change, migration, and urbanization) impacts the overall socio-economic development of Bangladesh negatively between 2007-2017 and continues to affect the development goals. This study recommends evidence-based recommendations to minimize the impacts of the triple mobility crisis and support and assist the affected population more effectively and purposefully.

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Note: The cover page picture is taken from the following link, I personally thought, it would capture the daily struggle the displaced Bangladeshi population faces due to the ongoing climate crisis (here it's flooding). Link: <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/climate-change-threatens-lives-and-futures-over-19-million-children-bangladesh>

The Impact of Persistent Climate Crisis on the mobility of Rural Bangladeshi Communities: How Far Would They be Able to Move and Sustain?

Muhammad Hassan Bin Afzal

Abstract:

This explorative study focuses on the intersection between economic disempowerment and positionality of rural communities in Bangladesh and how ongoing climate change impacts their willingness and ability to move to different locations for survival. Bangladesh is one of the most populous landlocked countries in the world located in Southeast Asia bordering with India, Myanmar, and Bay of Bengal. Almost half of the population lives in rural areas and mostly dependent on fishing and agricultural activities for their livelihood. Due to ongoing climate crises such as drought, flood, and earthquakes these rural communities are consistently being displaced. They have lost their livelihood and accommodation and did not have any other options but to migrate and survive. This paper focuses on the issue of (im)mobility for the marginalized and underserved Bangladeshi rural communities due to ongoing climate change and how the rate of urbanization increases in a decade (2007- 2017). This study addresses the theoretical framework of Mimi Sheller's triple mobility crisis such as climate change, migration, and urbanization and uses Bangladesh as a case study to investigate and analyze the ongoing detrimental impacts on the national economy, politics, technological advancement, environmental degradation. This study finds that the ongoing climate change causes huge displacement for the rural and underserved communities in Bangladesh and that results in a huge increase in both urbanization and migration nationally. The issue of ability to move and adjust in urban communities for the Bangladeshi displaced communities become a huge national crisis and affects the socio-economic development of Bangladesh. Finally, this paper finds strong historical evidence that the triple mobility crisis impacts the overall socio-economic development of Bangladesh negatively between 2007-2017 and continues to affect the development goals. This study recommends evidence-based recommendations to minimize the impacts of the triple mobility crisis and support and assist the affected population more effectively and purposefully.

Keywords: Mobility Crisis; Environmental Degradation; Climate Crisis; Movement Restrictions; Rural Development; Urbanization; Socioeconomic Development.

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Section 1: Introduction

For a long period of time, the societies around the world remained stationary and stagnant, people did not move to different locations due to communal feelings, attachment to their community members, family ties, and for safety reasons. Various shifting socioeconomic factors such as available resources, job sectors, cultural norms, and changes in lifestyle lead human beings to be more mobile and move to different places around the world to meet their constantly evolving needs and demands in their lives (Rist 2019; Sennett 2007; Bauman 2013). The intersection of power and human needs plays a major role in deciding the ability to move for the people. Marginalized, remote, and rural communities from all over the world are more vulnerable to the ongoing negative impacts of climate change.

Furthermore, these underserved communities suffer more due to their social positionality¹ and power they tend to have more restrictions and barriers to move to different locations (migration²). This results in a chain reaction such as increased urbanization and lower socioeconomic growth. Mimi Sheller argues that such trio of ongoing activities such as climate change, migration, and urbanization causes significant mobility injustice for the marginalized and underserved communities all over the world (Sheller and Urry 2003; Sheller 2018a). This paper argues that low-income and least developed countries are more prone to the triple mobility crisis and it becomes difficult for these countries to handle, facilitate, and mitigate these issues effectively compared to developed countries in the world. This paper uses the case of Bangladesh

¹ Social positionality refers to the collection of social identities such as race, gender, class, and access to resources. All these factors impact both ability and willingness to move physically, mentally, and socially to different locations due to evolving needs and circumstance changes (Allen 2005).

² When people moves from one place to another due to constant evolving needs and migration generally occurs within the national border and the regional areas (Society 2010)

and shows that between the period of 2007 -2017 the rate of urbanization increases by 7% (11.53 million people migrated to urban areas), and this impacts the overall socio-economic growth, public health, and access to resources for the population.

The triple mobility crisis impacts Bangladesh severely in the last decade and more people become homeless, jobless, and faces more restrictions to have access to resources. Due to the geographic location of Bangladesh, the rural and remote areas are more prone to seasonal floods, high salinity, and various types of natural disasters. According to a recent news report, only floods every year causes at least 100 death and .8 million displacements every year in Bangladesh. These communities lost their farming lands, access to fishing, and housing overnight and become both homeless and jobless. Due to their positionality and power, it is also difficult for them to migrate to urban areas for better resources and living (Jazeera 2019).

This paper explores the theoretical framework mobility justice, triple mobility crisis, and bodily movements and connects the current conditions of Bangladesh and offers a parallel comparison between the theoretical framework and actual conditions in the country. Finally, this paper recommends action plans to combat the ongoing crisis situations in Bangladesh and policy reformation and better infrastructure could be beneficial and sustainable for the more vulnerable and suffered population in Bangladesh.

Section II: Theoretical Background: Mobility Justice and Triple Mobility Crisis

Mobility justice focuses on human beings' rights, abilities, and willingness to move from one location to another how natural and/or artificial barriers and boundaries are constricting and delaying these movements. The climate change impacts the global communities and marginalized, rural, and underserved populations lost their job, home, and access to resources daily. But due to

imposed restrictions, government policies, and structural framework, it is very difficult for these people to move to a better place and integrate. Mimi Sheller argues for a more just system of mobility that more meaningfully serves the displaced and underserved global communities and states “mobility justice offers a new way to think across the micro, meso, and macro scales of transitioning toward more just mobilities” (pg. 18, Sheller 2018). Mobility justice incorporates various aspects of social justice practices such as transportation, migration, access to jobs, and the environment. The power dynamics in society play a major role in perpetuating either mobility justice or injustice and restricts and limits the movements certain human beings, communities, and groups based on their race, gender, economic status, education, and sexual orientation (Sheller 2018b; Sheller and Urry 2003; Sheller 2018a).

Mobility justice encompasses all the factors of human lives that cause either mobility or restriction of movements let it be access to transportation, age limits, or hostile work environment. Any problematic and toxic patterned behaviors that limit human beings to move and be mobile is a part of the mobility justice study. It is an iterative, contextualized, and accessible theoretical framework that supports the notion that human mobility on a global scale and promotes and advocates for a deeper and meaningful understanding of the restriction and limitations that society, policies, and social practices pose on other human beings. The triple mobility crisis incorporates climate change, migration, and urbanization theoretical frameworks to gain a deeper understanding of mobility justice on a global scale. Mimi Sheller (2018) contends that these three factors are in fact closely related to each other in terms of analyzing and understanding mobility justice and points out “these parallel crises of climate, urbanization, and migration is that all revolve around questions of mobility and immobility, and together they bring into focus the unjust power relations of uneven mobility (pg. 1)” (Sheller 2018a).

Therefore, the power relations and social identities play crucial roles in determining both mobility and immobility, speed of movement, location of movement, and quality of movements. For example, boarding experience for any regional flights would offer a snapshot of uneven power relations and movements. The persons with more financial power would buy the most expensive air ticket and would be able to board much faster compared to the standard economy ticket without any preassigned seat number.

Additionally, race, affiliation, ableism, and various related socially constructed identities also play a significant role in determining the speed, ability, and limitations of any airline passengers. Baldwin et al (2019) supports the notion of contextualized and evolving role of the triple mobility crisis in conceptualizing and exploring mobility justice and rightly points out that, “surrounding factors individual and household migration decisions are highly contextual, with pre-existing migration corridors and the dynamics of economic, political, demographic, social and environmental factors at the origin and destination playing key roles (pg. 291)” (Baldwin, Fröhlich, and Rothe 2019). Thus, the concept and understanding of both mobility justice and the triple mobility crisis are highly contextual, situation-dependent, and evolving. The next section will explore the current situation in Bangladesh and highlight both ongoing problems and barriers to appropriate opportunities for the affected population due to climate change and limitations to movements.

Section III: The Impacts of Climate Crisis in Bangladesh (2007-2017)

As one of the most densely populated countries in the world and low-lying geographical location, Bangladesh is consistently vulnerable to various types of climate crises ranging from flood, water shortage, riverbank erosion, drought to the cyclone. As of 2018, half of the total

Bangladeshi population (164.7 million) still lives in rural and remote areas and strongly dependent on farming, fishing, and other location-based activities for their living. Due to the adverse climate change from 2007 to 2017, more than a million people lost their farming lands and housing and ended being displaced totally. In 2016, almost 23.5 million people displaced due to extreme weather conditions and climate change (Foundation 2018). The annual report prepared by the Environmental Justice Foundation(EJF) identifies riverbank erosion as one of the primary causes of displacement for the Bangladeshi population and notes:

Riverbank erosion is the primary cause of climate displacement inland. Up to 50% of those now living in Bangladesh's urban slums may be there because they were forced to flee their rural homes as a result of riverbank erosion. Those who live on Bangladesh's river islands, known as chars, are especially at risk. Located within some of the world's most powerful river systems, chars can be formed or completely eroded over weeks or even days. The population of these islands, who the government of Bangladesh refers to as "immediately threatened", exceeds four million. River flooding is also a cause of displacement inland, and along with erosion is likely to become more significant under climate change, as rainfall both increases and becomes more erratic, and the melting Himalayan glaciers alter river flows (Foundation 2018, paragraph "displacement inlands").

According to a recent World Bank report, Bangladesh is one of the most vulnerable countries in terms of the ongoing climate crisis, population displacement, and erosion of riverbanks and farming lands on a continuing basis (World Bank 2018a). The negative impacts of ongoing climate crises do not merely limit displacement but also attributes to the highest number of yearly deaths (28%) due to environmental degradation and health hazards. Women and children are the most vulnerable to climate crisis from these rural and remote areas and they have less mobility to shift and relocate to a new place for a better life and adequate access to resources for living (Foundation 2018; World Bank 2018a; 2018b; Huang, Dijst, and Weesep 2018; Sheller and Urry 2003; Afzal and Bhuiyan 2015; Afzal Hossain, Shah-Newaz, and Afzal 2016). Due to the social

norms, cultural beliefs, and built-in infrastructure and frameworks, it is always difficult to combat the negative impacts of displacement for Bangladeshi women and they end up being trafficked to other countries against their will or lack any other options/choices for survival (World Bank 2018a; Foundation 2018). Subsequently, due to the ongoing negative impacts of the climate crisis in Bangladesh, the rate of urbanization increases rapidly between 2007 to 2017. The following figure explores the rapid changes in the annual rate of urbanization in Bangladesh between 2007 to 2017. This graph shows two interesting patterns in terms of shifting and relocating the rural vs. urban population. In this period, the rural population consistently decreased and the urban population continuously increased.

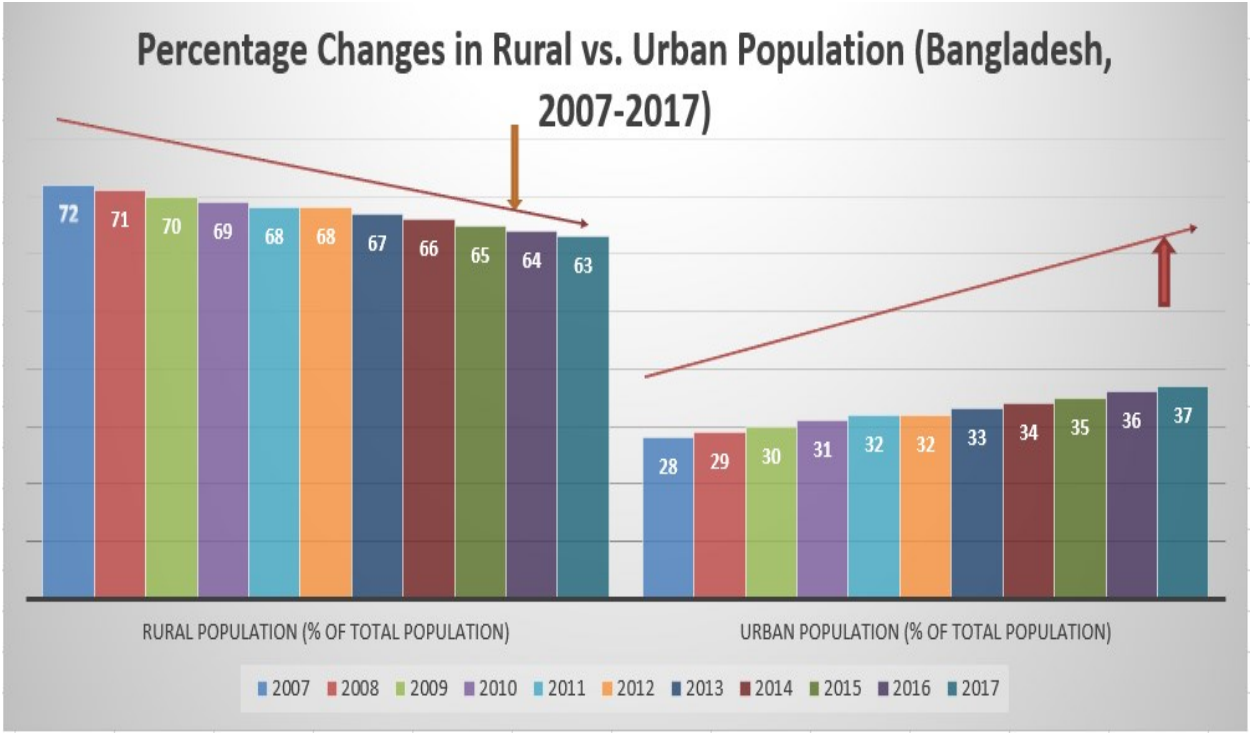


Figure 1: The shifting Dynamics of Rural vs. Urban Population Change in Bangladesh (2007-2017) [Data Source: World Bank³]

³ Figure 1 shows the data set collected from the World Bank Data Indicator (Author used Microsoft Excel to design, develop, and illustrate the above graph)

Figure-1 also points out that, between the period of 2007 to 2017, on average the rate of urbanization increases by 8%. Specifically, in 2017, a total number of 11.3 million people moved to urban areas due to various socio-economic factors. Unfortunately, in 2016, there were four major cyclones⁴ that took place in coastal Bangladesh and almost 28 million people were displaced from their house and farmlands. Unfortunately, only 40% of the total displaced population made it to the urban areas according to the World Bank Data Source, and another half of the displaced population in Bangladesh could not move to the different locations.

In other words, due to climate change, the impact is very severe for the Bangladeshi population, yet, they could not move to a different location inside their own national boundary due to their various intersectional social identities such as age, race, gender, religion, and ableism. This is a mobility injustice for the suffered Bangladeshi population due to the extreme and harsh yearly weather conditions and half of the affected population does not have the appropriate means and tools to navigate such difficult situations (World Bank 2018b; 2018a; Foundation 2018).

Section IV: Gaps in Theoretical Frameworks

The theoretical framework of the triple mobility crisis points out that climate change, migration, and urbanization are interrelated and strongly connected and impact each other simultaneously to determine the mobility factor for the affected population. To support this notion, Mimi Sheller contends “mobility and immobility are always connected, relational, and co-dependent, such that we should always think of them together, not as binary opposites but as dynamic constellations of multiple scales, simultaneous practices, and relational meanings (pg.1)”

⁴ “In 2016 there were four cyclones – Roanu, Kyant, Nada and Vardah – in the Bay of Bengal, whereas usually there is only one” (Foundation 2018)

(Sheller 2018a; Sheller and Urry 2003; Sheller 2018a). Other researchers point out that, displacement does not automatically lead to either migration and/or urbanization for the affected population. Instead, the ability to move is highly contextual and depends on no various inter-reliant factors such as financial ability and social identities. The ability to mobilize and move to different locations is highly contextual, situation-dependent, and highly imbalanced. The concept of adaptive capacity⁵ explores the ability to move for the relegated and affected population due to ongoing climate change and how some people manage to move to urban communities, and some could not due to their intersectional social identities and power in that society (Baldwin, Fröhlich, and Rothe 2019; Kumar and Moledina 2018; Bakewell 2009). Figure-2 illustrates the three key pillars of the triple crisis that strongly contribute to the mobility or immobility of the affected population.

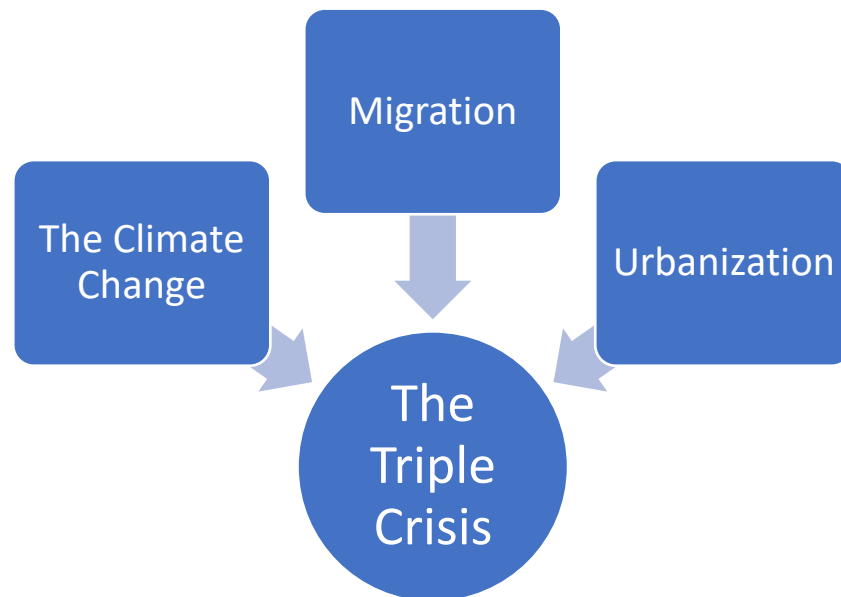


Figure 2: The Theoretical Framework of Triple Crisis in Mobility Justice (Sheller 2018 a.)

⁵ “adaptive capacity is highly uneven, mediated by intersectional considerations, such as one’s position in relation to capital, gender, ethnicity, class, race, and sexuality” (Baldwin, Fröhlich, and Rothe 2019)

Here, figure-2 illustrates the three key aspects of the triple crisis, yet it does not account for all the displaced population in the case of Bangladesh. Only half of the population managed to migrate to different places and in urban areas, but the other half could not able to bodily move to different places due to their varying degrees of social identities. That’s why, Mimi Sheller strongly recommends for a more expansive and iterative theoretical framework to study and conceptualize the mobility justice and argues for “more robust and comprehensive theory of mobility justice can help us address the combined “crises” of climate change, sustainable urban transitions, resource depletion and global migrations (pg.30)” (Sheller 2018b).

Section V: How Public Health is Affected by the Ongoing Climate Crisis?

The direct negative impacts of the climate crisis in Bangladesh are deteriorating public health and severe public displacements. The coastal areas comprise 29% of the total population in Bangladesh and these people are most vulnerable to the climate crisis such as high tide, flood, increased salinity, and land erosion.

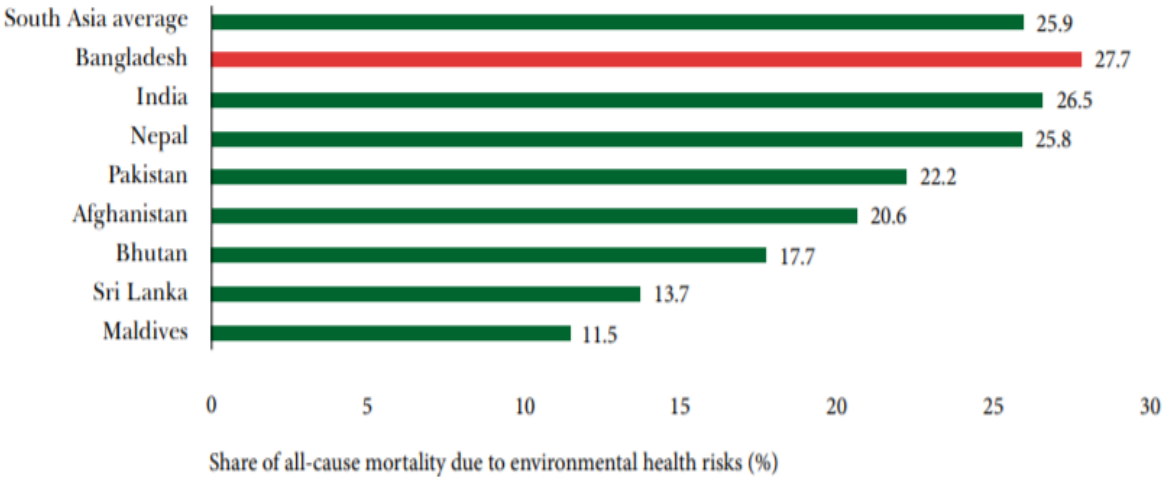


Figure 3: Deaths attributed to the Climate Change and Crisis in South Asian Countries (Source: World Bank Report 2018, IHME 2017)

The figure-3 from World Bank annual report on Bangladesh illustrates the deaths attributed to the climate crisis in Bangladesh (World Bank 2018a; “Bangladesh” 2015). The number of deaths in Bangladesh was the highest among the neighboring south Asian countries in Bangladesh in 2015 due to the ongoing climate crisis. The number of deaths attributed to the environmental change and climate crisis was 28%, which was much higher compared to the neighboring countries. Subsequently, in 2016, due to the extremely harsh weather and climate change, almost 2.4 million Bangladeshi people were displaced, still, only half of the displaced people managed to migrate to the urban communities in Bangladesh (see figure-1 for 2016 data). The other half of the displaced communities did not able to move due to their varying degrees of intersectional social identities and ended up being more marginalized and underserved (World Bank 2018b; 2018a; Foundation 2018). The ongoing challenges and barriers for Bangladeshi displaced communities are getting harder than before, even though, the government along with international donor agencies are working relentlessly to improve the conditions, still, it seems inadequate so far (World Bank 2018b; Foundation 2018; Jazeera 2019; Asadullah 2013; Ashrafuzzaman and Furini 2019; Afzal Hossain, Shah-Newaz, and Afzal 2016).

The current socio-economic conditions for the displaced Bangladeshi population exacerbate due to lack of legal support, political will, dedicated institutional bodies to address these concerns, and available resources. Climate change is continuously affecting the remote, rural, and coastal populations in Bangladesh and every year millions of people become displaced, homeless, and jobless. Unfortunately, the local government does not possess enough resources and structured legal framework to support and help these displaced communities. As a result of the four serious cyclones in 2016, there was a sharp rise in migration numbers from Bangladesh. In

2017, there were 3000 Bangladeshi climate migrants⁶ arrived in Italy. This was quite an increase, since, there was only one climate migrant in 2016 (Foundation 2018). Unfortunately, the total number of Bangladeshi displaced communities is large that, regardless, of increased urbanization and both internal and external migration, there are almost half of the displaced population still could not move and become mobile to have access to better life and resources.

Section VI: Mobility Justice Theory vs. Reality in the Case of Bangladesh

Historical data and public interviews from the coastal and river embankment areas in Bangladesh shows that the local communities consistently suffer from the high tide, excess salinization, and embankment erosion (Foundation 2018; Ashrafuzzaman and Furini 2019). This causes the displaced population to move to different cities to survive and looking for socioeconomic opportunities. Unfortunately, according to the historical facts and data analysis, almost half of the population did not manage to move internally within the country (migration) or externally (outside of the country). Every year, almost more than 40% of displaced populations do not get the opportunities to move to the urban areas, other cities, or different countries due to their limitations in economic power and marginalized social identities. The theoretical framework of the triple mobility crisis aptly captures both mobility and immobility factors for the displaced Bangladeshi population every year due to changing the climate crisis, yet not all of them are empowered enough to move and relocate to different locations to survive, earn, and maintain their basic human rights.

Subsequently, the number of people migrate to the urban areas is not the direct result of only climate change-induced displacements. There are various other factors that interplay to

⁶ Climate migrants refer to the climate change induced displaced population, who are forced to leave their home region to maintain their wellbeing and access to resources (Gleick 2014).

stimulate the urbanization factors in Bangladesh such as changing economic conditions, political unrest, and better job opportunities. Also, the sense of community and belongingness play a major role in determining the change in localities among the rural population (Clark and Wise 2018; Goetz 2013). Above all, half of the displaced population that ends in urban Bangladeshi areas suffers from such hardships in terms of having access to clean water, housing, job, and decent earning to live above the poverty line. The following figure-4 explores changing urban life quality and access to basic services for the continuously increasing Bangladeshi urban population⁷.

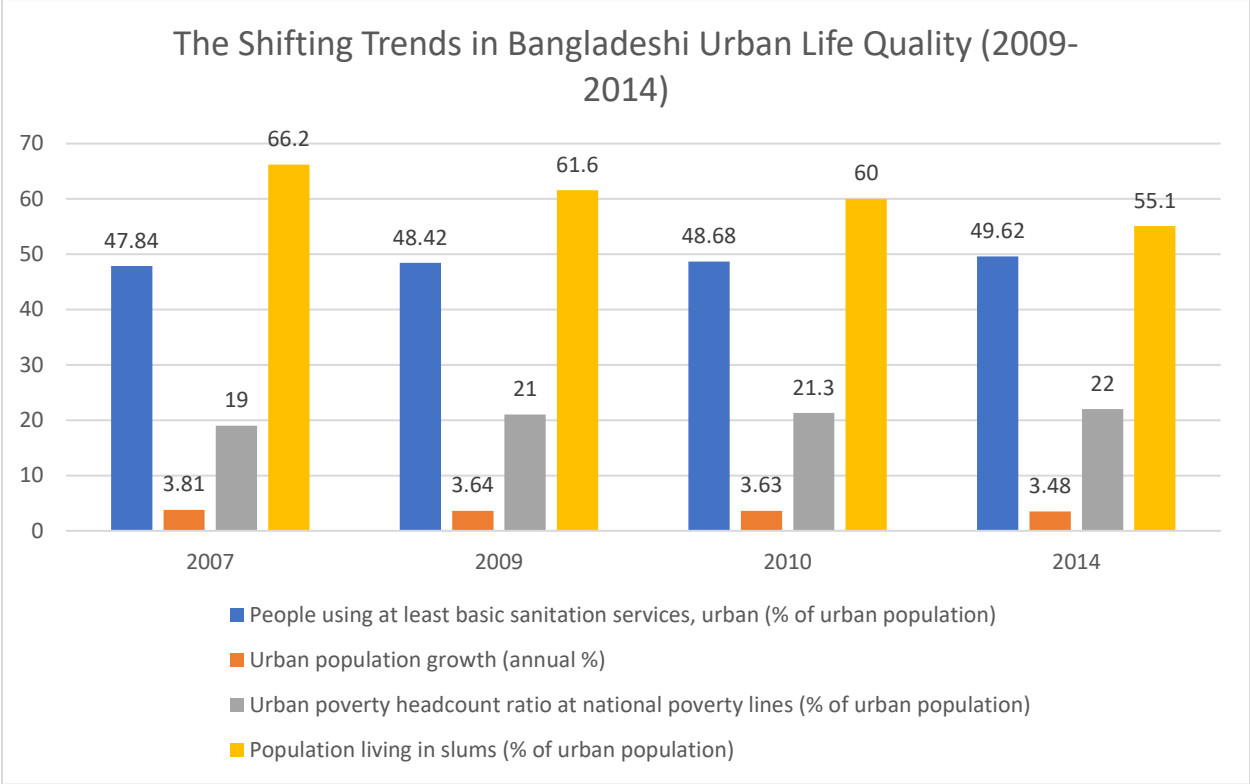


Figure 4: The Urban Life Quality in Bangladesh (Source: World Bank Report 2018)⁸

Here, figure-4 illustrates the continuous socioeconomic and public health struggle for the Bangladeshi population due to the rapid urbanization and migration factors. Although the

⁷ Data collected from the World Bank Data Indicator for Bangladesh Country Profile.

⁸ Figure 4 shows the data set collected from the World Bank Data Indicator (Author used the Microsoft Excel to design, develop, and illustrate the above graph)

Bangladeshi government in collaboration with foreign donor agencies builds a better framework to support the urban communities, still, more than half of the 2014 urban population lived in the slum areas and almost 22% of the urban population still lives under the poverty line. As a low-income country, it is very difficult for Bangladesh to support, facilitate, and assist the rapid urbanization over the years. Although, there is a little progress attained over the year to reduce the percentage of the population living in slum areas the progress is not enough to offer more comprehensive socioeconomic support to the migrated and displaced population. More focused attention towards sustainable rural development that facilitates the overall wellbeing of the rural communities such as better access to electricity, education, and job sectors is important to empower these displaced rural communities in Bangladesh due to the ongoing impacts of the climate crisis and land erosion (Afzal 2017b; 2017a). Furthermore, it is also acknowledged in this article that, the urbanization and migration cannot fully equate to the climate crisis-induced displacement. There are other socio-economic and political factors that cause internal migration and urbanization. Still, the ongoing climate crisis is one of the key factors that cause both displacement and urbanization.

Section VII: Concluding Remarks

This paper highlights the ongoing severe impacts of climate change in Bangladesh and how the rural and coastal population are most vulnerable and consistently suffers from various socioeconomic and social disempowerment in the long run. Historical data also finds out due to the intersectional power and social identities of the displaced Bangladeshi population, almost half of the population could not move to the urban or any other areas. The other half who were able to move to different locations could not manage to live a decent life ends in urban slums and almost 22% of the urban population lives under the poverty line.

The climate crisis-induced Bangladeshi population faces gross mobility injustice and their human rights violated on a continuing basis. This paper strongly advocates for more meaningful and impactful international collaboration with the current Bangladeshi government to develop, create, and implement policies, support services, and job sectors to assist the displaced population. The climate crisis is a global issue, but the marginalized and low-income countries suffer the most due to their limited financial resources and ongoing political turmoil. In the specific case of Bangladesh, the geographical location, the rising sea level, high population, and lower economical condition make it difficult to combat the ongoing detrimental impacts of the climate crisis. Therefore, the displaced population faces mobility injustice daily and do not have the privilege and adequate empowerment to be mobile and migrate to a better place for better life quality. Mimi Sheller (2018) rightly recognizes such problematic and uneven geopolitical practices among the nations and how that severely impacts the low-income and marginalized global population and states:

...the taking of the global commons, and its degradation by resource extraction and pollution (mining, fracking, oil drilling, etc.), is linked to the production of both climate disruption and human impoverishment and displacement. Yet at the same time, this theft benefits from national borders that prevent the mobility of all people by taking away the mobile commons of human freedom of movement. Borders fix identities in place, deny freedom of movement, and undermine our common humanity (pg. 168).

All in all, the annual displacement among rural Bangladeshi communities is directly caused by the ongoing severe climate crisis. Unfortunately, due to intersectional relegation between social identity and power, almost half of the displaced people cannot move to different places. Both global organizations and local governments are strongly recommended to find mutually beneficial and sustainable solutions to ensure safety, accommodation, and liberty to move for the affected population in Bangladesh.

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