

Research Briefing

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The Advantages of Migration to Dhaka

CONTEXT

People on low incomes keep coming to Dhaka, despite tremendous difficulties. It will be very hard to stop this migration and the city benefits from their presence in many ways.

Estimates of migration to Dhaka are as high as 400,000 people a year. It is the intended destination for the majority of internal migrants in Bangladesh and Dhaka is already one of the most densely populated cities in the world. This trend for movement to Dhaka will continue until people have positive alternatives.

Academics from three Universities in the UK (Sussex, Durham and SOAS) and the International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD) have spent two years investigating what draws people to Dhaka. This involved a quantitative survey with more than 1,000 households as well as multiple in-depth interviews with more than 50 participants in three low-income neighbourhoods in Dhaka.

Efforts by government and NGOs to improve conditions in low income neighbourhoods in Dhaka are extremely uneven. Where improvements do occur, there is a suspicion amongst policy makers that they will simply encourage more people to come. Even residents of these neighbourhoods are wary of positive changes since they fear that improvements will increase the likelihood of eviction. Yet enlightened policy can ease both these concerns.

Key findings:

Based on our survey of over 1,000 households in the city:

- Despite the incredibly challenging physical environment, **most people were satisfied with their decision to come to the city.**
- Approximately half reported that their **mobility was severely constrained**; they were unable to move within the city or back to rural areas, when they did move it was the result of a forced eviction.
- The remainder had moved within the city and planned to do so again. **Changes in residential location were most commonly driven by the search for more secure housing**; of all the households involved in our research, only one had legal title and one had a lease. The large majority had no documents at all.
- **People work very hard.** Many combined several jobs and the majority reported having worked between 26 and 30 days in the previous month.
- **Many families remain split between Dhaka and rural areas** – 64% reported having close family living elsewhere in Bangladesh. Despite their poverty, one third of households reported that they supported people living elsewhere, although less than 10% received any support themselves.
- Just under half were **optimistic about their future in Dhaka.** This optimism was due largely to plentiful livelihood opportunities, strong communities and, most significantly, to stable housing.



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Research approach

Research for this project began at the end of 2016 with a series of focus groups in three low-income neighbourhoods in Dhaka.

Representative statements from focus groups about mobility to and around the city and about each neighbourhood were selected for use in individual ranking exercises known as Q method. This resulted in a number of groups with similar attitudes about place and mobility.

These group descriptions were used as the main independent variable in a random survey of over 1,000 households conducted in June 2017 and repeated in July 2018 to provide longitudinal data.

During the year between the two surveys a range of qualitative methods were developed including 50 oral migration histories, 30 walking interviews, community mapping exercises and photography.

Engagement with policymakers

Migration to Dhaka is a vitally important issue. As the research develops we are keen to engage with policy makers to use our research to inform decisions.

CONTACTS

To get involved in our research contact:

Professor Michael Collyer

Project Lead

M.Collyer@sussex.ac.uk

Dr Andrew Baldwin

Coordinator of Dhaka research

w.a.baldwin@durham.ac.uk

FURTHER INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

Research in Dhaka is part of a larger comparative project called Migrants on the Margins, exploring migration into low income neighbourhoods in three other cities: Colombo (Sri Lanka), Harare (Zimbabwe) and Hargeisa (Somaliland). Information on the project is on <https://migrantsonthemargins.tumblr.com>

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