

Climate Refugees in Bangladesh and their Tolls on the Economy - Tamara Schexnider

As a low-lying country on a river delta, Bangladesh has long been prone to natural disasters. The country was one of the first in the world to produce climate refugees, or climate-induced displaced people (CIDP). The main environmental challenges that Bangladesh faces, which are continuously worsened with time due to climate change, are floods, cyclones, and riverbank erosion. In this paper, I will discuss the displacement of citizens into other cities and countries, and the resulting economic implications (specifically GDP). More and more Bangladeshis face displacement as a result of extreme weather events every year, and this mass displacement is having its toll not only on the geographic landscape but also on the country's economic development.

Bangladesh has an area of about 147,000 square kilometers and 171,186,372 people (World Population Review, 2022). Annually, about a quarter of the country is flooded, and people living in coastal areas are particularly vulnerable (Islam et. al. 2017). The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) shows a trajectory on increased displacement of people by extreme weather events. Most refugees migrate within Bangladesh to the port of Mongla, which has grown accustomed to its reputation as a destination for migrants. There, refugees arrive after losing their homes, jobs, and sometimes their families. As a result, the Bangladeshi government has spent millions of Bangladeshi taka, equivalent to tens of thousands of dollars, "to protect the Mongla town with climate-resilient infrastructure, drawing at-risk people from the remotest villages," (Alam 2022). As a result, this can arguably be considered a positive or negative outcome: many have had and will still need to evacuate their homes, but also, their likely new home will be better protected against the same harms.

In fact, Mongla has been largely supported by other countries, which may reveal how seriously other countries understand this matter. Investments, most of which are foreign, “have doubled at the Mongla Export Processing Zone over the last four years, creating new jobs in its factories for the climate refugees from the region. The funds, which come from the United States, Japan, South Korea, and China, among others, have prevented the refugees from moving to big cities,” (Alam 2022). Even with the positive effects occurring in Mongla, however, there is still an overall negative effect on GDP of Bangladesh as a result of climate displacement. The main issue is that “Responding to disasters has already diverted significant parts of the development budget, with over US\$10 billion invested by the Government of Bangladesh over the last three decades in making the country more climate resilient and less vulnerable to natural disasters,” (Islam et. al. 2017). In diverting so many funds to projects like Mongla, the national government continues to disrupt its ability to achieve economic growth and eradicate poverty. Furthermore, “There is a consensus among international communities that climate-induced displacement worsens pre-existing stressors, such as poverty, underdevelopment, and gender inequality,” (Kisinger et. al. 2017). As more and more citizens evacuate, there are fewer opportunities for them to contribute to the growth of the country’s GDP (through consumption, investment, and exports and imports, as $GDP = C + I + G + (Exp - Imp)$). Women, children, and people with disabilities are the most vulnerable (Islam et. al. 2017), further perpetuating poverty gaps and gender inequalities across different people in the country.

As climate change continues to worsen, more and more Bangladeshis will flee their homes, and eventually the country as well for some. As this continues, the country’s economy will take a serious toll and will have fewer funds available to resolve these climate disasters. This

same problem will not only apply to Bangladesh, and many less developed countries will suffer the same environmental and economical consequences.

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