Framing Migration in the context of Climate Change in Bangladesh

Research report
Wout Vriens
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Hydro-Social Deltas: Understanding flows of water and people to improve policies and strategies for disaster risk reduction and sustainable development of delta areas in the Netherlands and Bangladesh

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INTRODUCTION

Urban migration in climate-vulnerable Bangladesh

Whenever the words ‘Bangladesh’ and ‘migration’ are used in the same sentence in the media, you will very likely hear ‘climate change’ in the next. In this report we investigate why this implicit connection between migration and climate change is ubiquitous. We also investigate alternative understandings of the reasons for migration. Here we briefly sketch the geographical and historical context within which migration and climate change are discussed in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh, like many so-called least-developed countries, is in the midst of a transition from a rural-based to an urban-based society, as witnessed by the influx of rural emigrants into the cities (Herrmann and Svarin 2009). Migration has historically been a common livelihood strategy in the Bay of Bengal, both within poor and better-off groups (Haider 2010, 307-308). The rapid and unplanned urbanization of the last decades, however, poses increasing challenges to life and livelihoods in the city, not the least for the dwellers of the burgeoning slums on the urban periphery. The congested infrastructure, overburdened public services and growing poverty render this urban growth a cause of growing concerns for public authorities and residents (DESA 2014, Begum 1999).

Literature portrays natural disasters as a red thread running through history in the Bay of Bengal (Khatun 2013, Poncelet 2009). Due to its unique geographical location Bangladesh is highly susceptible to a host of environmental hazards. This, in the words of the Government of Bangladesh (GoB), “unfavourable natural heritage” acts in tandem with widespread poverty, poor governance, insufficient infrastructure, and a rapidly-growing population, leaving Bangladesh extremely vulnerable to environmental hazards (Myers 1993, Kalland and Persoon 2013).

Today, Bangladesh finds itself faced with yet another environmental challenge: climate change. Global environmental change poses a threat especially to less economically developed countries, low-lying densely-populated delta regions, and environmentally-dependent livelihood systems (Climate Central 2015, McGranahan, Balk en Anderson 2007). Given that Bangladesh portrays all three traits, it is generally acknowledged to be at the top list of countries most vulnerable to the impacts of global warming and altering weather patterns (Harmeling 2012). Its unsolicited role as ‘climate change pioneer’ has catapulted Bangladesh into the global climate change debates (Lewis 2011).

There is a broad consensus that climate change and migration are inextricably connected (Black 2001). Climate change is predicted to lead to an increase in the frequency and intensity of natural hazards (IOM 2012) which are also recognized as drivers of migration (Ahsan, Karuppannan and Kellett 2011).

Debates & significance study

As climate change science has become more prolific and prominent in national and international policy circles, the study of climate change discourse has emerged. This report
engages with and contributes to climate change discourse research. Specifically, the report analyses the effect of climate change, as a discursive concept, has as on the way the migration-environment-urbanization nexus in Bangladesh is portrayed (Arnall and Kothari 2015, 200).

Migration has historically been an important livelihood strategy in the Bay of Bengal, well before climate change made its way onto the global agenda. Migration scholars have long emphasised the complexity and multi-causality of human mobility and generally highlight its positive potential for livelihood security (Black 2001, Morrissey 2012). This depiction is increasingly facing headwind, nevertheless, as the environmentally-deterministic and typically negative picture of migration, advanced by climate change scholars, wins terrain. However, this calamity-imbuied framing of migration has drawn sharp criticisms. Critics denounce that this crisis narrative obscures the role of human interventions in the ecosystem, and of the powerful yet disproportionate impact of economic, social and political constrains that place underprivileged groups in a profoundly disadvantaged position to start with (Indra 2000, Paprocki 2016).

This study builds onto previous research on discourse, politics and expert perceptions of climate change. Notably germane to this article is the research of Grant et al., who reveal a developing trend worldwide to label natural disasters as “climate change disasters”, a discursive phenomenon for which the authors coined the term ‘climatization’. Their study points at the risks for climatization “to be used as a means to cover up negligence or bad management and there is a risk that by climatizing a disaster key vulnerabilities may be overlooked” (Grant, Tamason and Jensen 2015). This article asserts an analogous trend in regard to the discussion on (urban) migration.

Other research on discourses and politics of climate change in Bangladesh paints a critical picture of the uses and abuses of this climatization of the discourse by powerful interests in Bangladesh and in neighbouring countries (Siddiqi and Rai 2013). The comprehensive book edited by Mallick and Etzold argues that climate change migration literature tends to overrate the role of environmental drivers in general for migration patterns, overlooking other divers such as evictions and pull factors like urban employment (Mallick and Etzold 2015).

This mixed picture of the written framings of climate change migration in policy documents and scientific literature, where climatization dominates, stands in contrast with the findings of Stojanov et al. on the spoken framings. They questioned Bangladeshi experts on their perception of migration as a climate change adaptation strategy for Bangladeshis and found that the experts’ perceptions generally “match the nuances and subtleties present in migration and livelihoods literature” (Stojanov, Duží and Kelman 2015).

**Research objective and questions**

The above-mentioned growing trend to frame climate change as the overriding driver of migration in Bangladesh forms the incentive for and key focal point of this paper (Bettini 2013). Our paper places problem framing or problematization at the heart of the analysis, probing what key stakeholders consider to be ‘real problem’ with regard to Bangladesh’ migration, urbanization, and climate change issues. The analysis integrates key informant interviews with so-called grey literature (i.e. non-peer-reviewed papers, reports, speeches etc.),
in order to scrutinize the tension between experts’ spoken framings and the written framings circulating in the debate in Bangladesh and prevalent in key stakeholder grey literature.

Two questions are central here, the how and why of actors’ framing strategies. The first research question asks: How do key stakeholders in Bangladesh – the GoB, researchers, international donors, and NGOs – frame the on-going urban migration, and how do they consider peoples’ migration decision to be linked to climate change? The analysis also show which frame key stakeholders adopt in different contexts and towards different audiences.

Next, the study explores why key stakeholders may use certain framings in certain contexts. The chapter “Discussion – Depoliticizing migration & climate change” seeks to answer the second research question: What are the rationales underlying the identified framings. This question inextricably ties to the implications each framing entails for assessing and addressing (urban) migration. The problem-framing that manages to dominate the debate defines the available policy options and the range of legitimate actors for providing solutions (Feindt and Oels 2006, 169). The ensuing decisions depend on which priorities the dominant framing sets, and which trade-offs and risks are (tacitly) deemed acceptable (Bardwell 1991, 604).
RESEARCH APPROACH

Data collection

Our analysis is based on qualitative data collected by means of semi-structured key informant interviews and review of grey (key stakeholder) literature, most of which was carried out as part of a three-month field study in Bangladesh’ capital city, Dhaka (January-April 2016) in the context of a MSc International Development Studies dissertation at the University of Amsterdam. The dissertation was supported by the research project “Hydro-Social Deltas: Understanding flows of water and people to improve policies and strategies for disaster risk reduction and sustainable development of delta areas in the Netherlands and Bangladesh (funded by the NWO WOTRO Urbanising Deltas of the World programme under number W07.69.110).

The geographical scope for respondent sampling confined itself to Dhaka Metropolitan District. The economy governance system of Bangladesh is highly centralized and Dhaka constitutes the country’s power centre (M. Ahmed 1996, Hossain 2004, Etzold and Mallick 2005). As a result, virtually all key stakeholders have their (national) head office in the capital. A few interviews took place after the field work and were conducted through video call from The Netherlands.

A total of 19 in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants (for a full list respondents and interview guide: see appendix). The informants are numbered in the text for anonymity reasons. Respondents were selected with a view to cover the four key stakeholder groups in the migration-climate change debate in Bangladesh: international donors, the GoB, researchers, and civil society organisations, on the grounds that they are in a position to wield (at least some) influence on the course of migration policy in Bangladesh. The migrants’ own perspectives – the ‘protagonists’ themselves – are not included; their voice in the policy making process is negligible (Kamruzzaman 2014).

The informant group consists of Bangladeshi and non-Bangladeshi professionals working in the substantive fields of development cooperation, poverty & economics, (urban) governance, environmental & climate change management, migration, and/or disaster risk reduction (DRR). All have enjoyed a higher education and many hold a senior position within their organization. However, this latter point was not necessarily our goal; we first of all wanted to cover all key stakeholders groups. A prior stakeholder mapping exercise that was conducted as part of the research project ‘Hydro-Social Deltas’ provided the initial list of relevant informants, from which half of the interviewees were selected. The remaining half was found by snowballing and by contacting the authors of sampled grey literature. All informants’ accounts are dealt with on equal terms, i.e. as one way to look at and talk about the issue at hand, regardless of professional status or affiliation. Full confidentiality and anonymity set the norm for all research-informant interactions, since an in-depth inquiry into migration and climate change inevitably touches upon topics (read: interests) that are particularly sensitive in Bangladesh (Manzoor, Rose and Sultan n.d.).

The information provided by the interviews is complemented by more than 100 key stakeholder documents, so-called ‘grey literature’, that deals with migration in Bangladesh, whether or not
in relation to climate change. Analysing these documents alongside the interview data allows us to observe differences between written and spoken framings. Written documents arguably have a greater outreach compared to verbal accounts.

The collection of this grey literature proceeded largely parallel with the sampling of respondents, except that it continued throughout the entire analysis and paper write-up, mainly by internet searches. Relevant publications of the Hydro-Social Deltas project partner organizations were searched first\(^1\), as well as GoB action plans on climate change and migration (e.g. BCCSAP, NAPA, etc.) The initial collection, contained references to other texts, thereby providing new points of entry for further data digging. Websites of respondents’ organizations were searched for relevant literature. Only non-peer reviewed material, authored or commissioned by (a) key stakeholder(s) is used as data and quoted in this paper (i.e. so-called grey literature). Relevant Bangladesh-specific peer-reviewed research is only included as reference, although it must be pointed out that many peer-reviewed publications result from commissioned projects that were also published as grey literature.

**Frame analysis**

This paper approaches the issue of climate change migration by means of frame analysis, which is a type of discourse analysis. Discourse, as conceptualized by Hajer, involves “an ensemble of ideas, concepts and categorizations through which meaning is given to phenomena” (Hajer 1995). Through the creation of meaning and knowledge, discourse has the power to shape human behaviour (Foucault 1979). Framing is more narrowly conceptualized, as describing how an issue is defined and problematized (Hope 2010). It thus involves a concrete focus for research. Moreover, the framing approach is more empirical and less normative than discourse analysis (Johnston and Klandermans 2003). The core of framing analysis is the question “what is the problem represented to be” (Bacchi 2009) also known as “problematization”. Problem framing is an integral part of policy discourse and, more importantly, the dominant problem framing also forms the dominant frame of reference through which an issue is interpreted. Each problematization highlights certain elements while obscuring others and suggests particular, differing solutions (Bacchi 2012).

The roots of our study design lie in the field of environmental politics, which emerged as a distinct field of study from the early 1990s. Seminal work by Hajer and Litfin, among others, revealed how environmental problems do not materialise by themselves but form the outcome of a discursive struggle between differing interests (Hajer 1993, Hajer 1995, Litfin 1994). Discourse analysis of policy making records has proven successful in discrediting the notion that environmental problems simply arise from scientific facts, instead exposing the pervasive influence of politics, social values, and expectations therein. (Schnaiberg 1990, Bardwell 1991). As such, climate change problems, like Bangladesh’ allegedly climate change-induced displacement, are inherently political in nature (Hajer and Versteeg 2005) – despite of the aura

\(^1\) The two partner organizations of the Hydro-social Deltas project are Flood Hazard Research Centre (FHRC), Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies (BCAS), and the close collaborating institutes include Deltas, Vulnerability and Climate Change, Migration and Adaptation (DECCMA), and Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU)
of scientific objectivity surrounding the globally-dominant discourse (Arnall and Kothari 2015).
GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE-MIGRATION FRAMES

Based on a review of global scientific literature a dichotomous ‘ideal-type’ classification of the framings of migration in the context of climate change (abbreviated below to CC-M) was developed by Hydro-Social Deltas project co-workers (Wesselink, Warner, Kooy et al. in press) (Table 1). The present research used this classification as starting point for the analysis of the collected texts. Six descriptors were identified to provide a more detailed description: problem identification; causality of migration; predictability & uncertainty; terminology; time frame; and solution framing. These descriptors emerged from the ongoing analysis in this study, informed by previous research on CC-M discourse classification and/or description (inter alia: Methmann 2010, Black 2001, Bettini 2013, Morrissey 2012, Stojanov, Kelman, et al. 2014, Stojanov, Duží and Kelman 2015 in press).

### Table 1 Classification of global CC-M framings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptors</th>
<th>Simplicity</th>
<th>Complexity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Problem identification</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem = urban migration</td>
<td>Problem = lacking/inadequate urban policy to manage inflow of urban migrants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migrants form a threat to national and/or international security &amp; risk for development BD</td>
<td>Migrants are driver development BD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migration = involuntary &amp; negative Impending doom narrative</td>
<td>Migration = positive &amp; livelihood strategy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scale migration abnormal due to climate change</td>
<td>Migration inevitable long run</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban growth = general trend BD</td>
<td>Also planned relocation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Causality migration</strong></td>
<td>De facto mono-causal; climate change = push factor overriding other drivers</td>
<td>Inherently multi-causal; climate change = one of many push &amp; pull factors &amp; exacerbating other drivers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simplification: Direct causal link environment hazards-migration</td>
<td>Complexity: Human mediation impact environmental hazards on migration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Predictability &amp; uncertainty</strong></td>
<td>CC-M link = Obvious &amp; unequivocal Indeterminable yet self-evident &amp; common sense</td>
<td>CC-M link = Complex &amp; ambiguous Indeterminable plus link can be counter-intuitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate refugee</td>
<td>Economic migrant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental refugee</td>
<td>Environmental migrant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecological refugee</td>
<td>Environmentally-induced displacement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-situ displacement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time frame</td>
<td>Outspoken future outlook and tense future predictions as key element for today’s claims</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Future as evidence for today’s claims</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Present-day as part of future</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preceding historical developments not considered</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Targets primarily actual processes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Problematizes future predictions for lack of accuracy &amp; usefulness</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Historicizing present process; Considerable attention paid to historical processes</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Solution framing</th>
<th>Address problem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reduce “bad” rural out-migration by making rural areas more attractive; urban deterrence policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Facilitate “good” migration &amp; steer migration to regional cities not Dhaka</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>External solution</th>
<th>Internal solution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demand funding and technological support from industrialized countries; New international convention for protection of climate change-related displacement</td>
<td>Internal policy reform; Nation-wide urban (development) policy; GoB decentralization governance and economy; Invest rural DRR where possible &amp; proactive planned relocation where impossible in long-term</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CLIMATE CHANGE-MIGRATION FRAMES IN BANGLADESH

The following section presents how key stakeholders, in both public documents and interviews, frame migration in Bangladesh and its link to climate change. The analysis is organised using the descriptors in Table 1 (page 10), which are then made specific for Bangladesh using the collected data (interviews and key stakeholder documents). Respondents are numbered in order to make them anonymous (see Table 8 in Annexe). Each section starts with a summary of the findings, which are then expanded and detailed using quotes from interviews and key stakeholder documents.

The six descriptors are key to a systematic demonstration of the differences between and within the different framings adopted by key stakeholders. Notably, it facilitates systematic scrutiny of what key informants are saying but also what they are not saying. However, the distinction between the descriptors is not always clear cut. For example, in the interviews the problem identification was often linked to the identification of causality (see below). This of course is exactly the point of using “framing” as overarching concept: a frame is a coherent combination of all six descriptors.

In addition, it is important to note that the debate on the migration-climate change link cannot be reduced to yes or no questions. The dichotomous classification of ‘simplicity-complexity’ framings should therefore rather be seen as the ends of a continuum. Key stakeholders can be placed on this continuum based on the extent to which they assert climate change plays a role in migration decisions. Contingent on the descriptor, migration driver and/or context, the role attributed to climate change can vary between ‘none’ to ‘partly’ to ‘overriding’. The framing put forward by a single actor is therefore rarely entirely simplistic or entirely complex, but is usually made up of both simplistic and complex representations. Moreover, as the following will show, actors can adopt different, even contradictory framings vis-à-vis different audiences.

Problem identification

The issue of unfettered urban growth and the manifold problems this entails for Bangladesh has given rise to assertions that urban migration is a problem which should be discouraged and counteracted. This section deals with the question of problem identification: whether, according to the key stakeholders, the inflow of migrants to the cities does indeed represent a problem or, if not, what then is the ‘real’ problem? If migration should not be seen a problem then how should it be construed? The ideal-type answers are listed in Table 2.

Table 2 Problem identification in simplistic/complex CC-M frames

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SIMPLICITY</th>
<th>COMPLEXITY</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Problem = urban migration</td>
<td>Problem = not urban migration but lacking/inadequate urban policy manage the inflow of migrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migrants form a threat to national and/or international security &amp; risk for development Bangladesh</td>
<td>Migrants = driver development BD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migration = positive livelihood strategy</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

12
Migration is not necessarily a problem

Overall, respondents share the view that it would be wrong to list all migration in Bangladesh under the heading ‘problem’, and that doing so may have far-reaching repercussions for the effectiveness of Climate Change Adaptation (CCA) action now and in the future. A frequent line of argumentation in interviews and documents dismisses the notion that migrants represents a problem but depicts migration as an historically commonplace strategy in the Bay of Bengal in light of livelihood security and calamities, which includes (but is not limited to) violent conflicts and environmental hazards (IOM 2010, Etzold 2015, Haider 2010, 307-308). Moreover, it is emphasized repeatedly that migration forms a keystone of Bangladesh’ economic development.

“Migrants are a fundamental part of Bangladesh’ success story. Their labour is crucial for the economic development. [There is a] constant labour shortage in Dhaka, they are much needed.” [12]

“Migration is an integral component of the development process in contemporary Bangladesh. Migration is recognised as a driver of development” (GED 2015, 249).

In the context of climate change, migration emerges in some literature as a positive adaptation mechanism with a view to cope with and offset the adverse impacts of climate change – just as it has done throughout the ages for life and livelihood security (Tanner, et al. 2007, 27, 121). Labour mobility, which is primarily temporary of nature, is therefore considered a solution instead of a problem (I. A. Khan, et al. 2010, Etzold and Mallick 2015, Kartiki 2011, Poncelet 2009, Rayhan and Grote 2007, GED 2015, 946-7). The following quotes from the interviews illustrate this position.

“Temporary or circular migration is a livelihood adaptation strategy. … People are already adapting, doing the best they can in the current circumstances.” [8]

“.. [t]emporary migration aimed at income differentiation, which is mostly individuals, who send remittances back home. This is very important and should be supported. This way migration enhances people’s resilience.” [1]

"Diversification of livelihood income {within families} is already rising in BD. This way the problem will get much more manageable.” [10]

Another, related framing also sees migration as a solution, albeit the only possible solution. Several respondents argue that in light of future sea level rise, emigration from coastal regions will be inevitable in the long run.
“[P]articularly in the context of BD with its coastal population, I see the issue of migration as a solution rather than a problem.” [11]

“Too many people are living in climate change-vulnerable areas. Out-migration forms a solution to this issue.” [1]

“In the early phases we were thinking of adaptation in situ. Helping people to manage where they are. … But in the long run they cannot continue to live there. In the long run, they have to move.” [11]

Respondent 1 and 10 agree that urban migration should not be bracketed with the problems arising from the rapid, unfeathered urbanization.

“GoB says ‘urbanization is a problem’. But migration isn’t the problem. That is not to say that there aren’t any problems with it. It induces certain problematic trends in Bangladesh. … Slum dwellers living in vulnerable situations, that’s an acute problem.” [1]

“Urbanization forms a big problem for many, especially for slum dwellers, a problem. You get overpopulation, which has negative implications on a lot of aspects of many peoples’ lives. … It often leads, sustains and even reinforces patterns of poverty.” [15]

Respondent 15 also emphasizes the need to distinguish between migration and problems linked to urbanization, which is corroborated by an expert report informing GoB’s Seventh 5-year plan (Ahmed, Huq, et al. 2015, 20-21). To illustrate his point, respondent 15 highlights how migration only became considered a problem when the urban growth began to cause problems.

“Migration wasn’t considered in terms of a ‘problem’ before climate change. … Only when it began to lead to congestion of cities that migration really got to the attention of the government and development people.” [15]

Respondent 17 notes that talking about the ‘issue of urbanization’ is a faulty generalization by itself as not all cities are growing.

“Urbanization trends differ across Bangladesh. … Turbo-growth in Dhaka but at the same time a decline in Khulna & Bershala.” [17]

Migration can be a problem after all

However, respondents and the stakeholder documents concur that, in some cases, migration can represent a problem. Notably in cases where the decision to move is seen to be involuntary, rendering the phenomenon a matter of survival rather than an elective livelihood strategy (Akter 2009a, Zaman 2012).

“Natural hazards destroy people’s livelihood and then migration. This is forced migration, not voluntary, these people have no other option.” [1]

Respondent 7 links the latter type specifically with family migration to urban areas.

“Families only move to urban areas in case of extreme events, like cyclones or extreme floods. It is a survival strategy.” [7]
Nevertheless, contends respondent 10, this concerns only a minor part of the total population of migrants in Bangladesh.

“There is also the problem of involuntary migration. People who do not want to leave their areas, but have to. Although I wouldn't say that is a significant portion of the total displacement.” [10]

In the simplified framing the diversity in migration patterns found in the interview data presented above is patently discarded. Instead, migration is framed within a crisis narrative and thereby (implicitly) equated to involuntary displacement (EquityBD 2009, Percot 2012). Notably the GoB is found to simplify migration as forced displacement in its policy documents. GoB lists “curbing internal migration and displacement” as one the key priority issues in her 7th FYP for Climate Change Adaptation (GED 2015, 416). Other key stakeholders critique the GoB position that depicts migration as a source of problems, because it subsequently reduces the scope of migration policies (RMMRU 2013, Siddiqi and Rai 2013, 10).

“Social consequences of mass scale migration to cities would to some extent be halted. … In the long–term people might get a means to continue with farming, instead of migrating to cities after the flood” (MoEF 2005, 36-37).

Furthermore, GoB policy documents specifically focussing on CC-M deal exclusively with sudden (forced) displacement due to extreme weather events and environmental hazards (CDMP II 2014, Siddiqui, Towheedul and Akhter, NSMDCIID 2015). Migration is thus only considered in relation to disasters. The implicit message of this crisis narrative is the assumption that migration, by definition, is involuntary. This message is echoed in some grey literature and interviews too.

“Displacement, internal migration or seasonal mobility of the lowest social classes can hardly be considered as a choice in Bangladesh” (Percot 2012, 92).

“Internal migration is done by poor people. … and is forced in a way, they have no other livelihood options so they have to migrate.” [7]

“Natural hazards destroy people’s livelihood and then migration. This is forced migration, not voluntary, these people have no other option.” [1]

Some respondents argue that this perception is in fact that of the migrants themselves too.

“People don’t perceive internal migrants in a negative way. No migrant is discriminated against in Dhaka. … - Migrants themselves feel bad” [10]

“Erosion is a big problem in Bangladesh. People are forced to move to the city. We talked with slum dwellers, they don’t like to live in Dhaka! They have to in order to survive.” [14]

**Causality of migration**

Causality probes the question ‘what causes urban migration”? Which factor(s), according to key stakeholders, make(s) people decide to migrate to the city? What is climate change’s role in this decision-making process? The consensus in migration studies of migration as an inherently complex and multi-causal phenomenon is contested by some key stakeholders who
assert that the ‘push’ of climate change-induced natural disasters is discernibly overriding other drivers, rendering urban migration essentially a mono-causal phenomenon.

The discussion of the drivers of urban migration amongst key stakeholders in Bangladesh, however, does not quite fit with the complexity versus simplicity framework (Table 3), given the broad consensus that are more than one drivers are at play in Bangladesh. However, the simplicity-complexity dichotomy comes to the surface when examining how key stakeholders link – or do not link – these drivers with climate change.

### Table 3 Causality in simplistic/complex CC-M framings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Simplicity</strong></th>
<th><strong>Complexity</strong></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>De facto mono-causal; climate change = push factor overriding other drivers</td>
<td>Inherently multi-causal; climate change = one of many push &amp; pull factors &amp; exacerbating other drivers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simplification: Direct causal link environment hazards-migration</td>
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</tr>
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</table>


“When you talk about migration, you have entire families moving to urban areas; you have seasonal migration to the cities, migration between [rural] villages, migration abroad, and also religious persecuted migrants.” [7]

Socioeconomic factors are most often highlighted as the primary motivation – which can act as ‘pull’ or ‘push’ – for people to move (Marshall and Rahman 2012, RMMRU 2013, Garrett and Chowdhury 2004, Kartiki 2011). Respondent 8 is markedly outspoken on this.

“One certainty: most migrants are moving for economic reasons.” [8]


“The multimillion-dollar garment industry is a major draw card for women who migrate to urban areas in Bangladesh in search of work” (MoEF 2013).

Worth noting is respondent 18’s assertion that GoB itself also acts as a catalyst of migration.

“Government projects are an underexposed element that encourages migration. … GoB builds a bridge to connect a rural area with Dhaka. This facilitates, which
practically means ‘promotes’, migration. Their projects carry part of responsibility of problematic consequences of migration.” [18]


As for other frequently-raised environmental drivers, the interviews largely resonate with key stakeholder literature, for example salinization of the soil in coastal regions (Lein 2009, A. I. Khan, et al. 2010, 28).

“Coastal line of the Bay of Bengal is facing an increased saline intrusion. When farmers used to cultivate rice there, the salinization makes that now impossible. What options does a farmer have who only knows how to grow rice? He can decide to migrate to an urban area.” [8]

Water stress such as and droughts are also listed as drivers (Climate Change Cell 2008, Lein 2009, (Displacement Solutions 2012, Afifi, et al. 2015, A. I. Khan, et al. 2010, 29). Respondent 13 sees water excess and shortage to be an acute problem particularly in Northern Bangladesh.

“During the monsoon they [people in Northern Bangladesh] get too much water and during the dry periods they suffer because they have don’t get not enough.” [13]


“Locals' perception of their displacement, they will attribute it to an extreme event, like a cyclone.” [6]

Respondents therefore generally endorse the complexity framing.

“Migration is a multi-causal phenomenon. You cannot talk about a single cause. There are a lot of factors interacting in a very complex way, which ultimately leads to urbanization.” [8]

“There are many factors playing a role in migration patterns, both push- and pull-factors. The socio-economic conditions are already there. The environmental pressures are already there.” [14]

“Migration is a multi-causal phenomenon; even in cases where the environment is a predominant driver of migration it is usually compounded by social, economic, political and other factors” (Walsham 2010).

It follows from this that attempts to single out ‘that one decisive driver’ are rendered problematic. (Walsham 2010, CDMP II 2014, 3).

So how does climate change coming into this picture in the complexity framing?

“Climate change reinforces the other factors that cause migration.” [9]

The general thrust of the interviews and key stakeholder documents is that climate change, above all, exacerbates existing problems.

“Climate change reinforces existing vulnerabilities.” [10]

“Development issues such as population growth, seasonality and access to finance are being exacerbated by climate change.” [13]

Figure 1 visualizes how natural scientists project the global phenomenon to exacerbate environmental stress and hazards in the Bay of Bengal – here specifically for coastal regions (WDB 2017).

This means – if the models turn out right – that issues such as food security, livelihood security, health and safe housing, which were already areas of concern in Bangladesh (Choudhury 2002), may become increasingly acute in the future (Azam and Falk 2013, Lewis 2011, Rahman, et al. 2007, MoEF 2009).

When rephrasing the above question ‘what drivers of migration exist in Bangladesh’ to the more open question of ‘what causes migration in Bangladesh’, a fault line is discernible between the interviews and a significant number of the key stakeholder documents. Most interviewees say that migration in Bangladesh today is primarily driven by pull-factors. Respondent 10 cites the disproportionate growth of Dhaka vis-à-vis regional cities to evince the key importance of socioeconomic pull-factors in migration patterns. Respondent 17 compares the current situation to the situation in the 70s and 80s.

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2 For example, (Poncelet 2009) makes such attempt.
"In the 80s, migration was primarily caused by push-factors: Disasters, social, natural (e.g. riverbank erosion) Today, migration in BD is primarily driven by pull-factors." [17]

This view is contested in key stakeholder literature, however. The simplistic doom narrative states that climate change is tipping the scale in Bangladesh, making life unbearable for those already encumbered by natural stress and thereby forces people to move and is found to have gained wide acceptance among key stakeholders. In this narrative, the link between people’s decision to migrate and the global phenomenon climate change is rendered unequivocal. The crucial difference with the complexity framing is that here climate change-induced disasters are asserted to be overriding other drivers of urban migration in Bangladesh (Percot 2012, 7-8, Hossain and Miah 2011, Sajjadur Rahman 2010, Rahman and Rahman 2015, 104).

Figure 2 Migration trend due to climate change factors (Ahsan 2013)

Our study found a significant number of key stakeholder documents probing the impact of natural hazards on migration in Bangladesh, that assert an upward trend over the last decades of migration due to climate change. A minority discerns an increase as early as the 70s, but the general thrust is that an ascendant trend becomes unequivocal from the turn of the millennium on as is visualized in Figure 2 (Ahsan 2013, Khatun 2013, Mezudi 2010, Ahsan, Kellett and Karuppannan 2014, Ahsan, Karuppannan and Kellett 2011, Herrmann and Svarin 2009, Akter 2009a, Al Faruque and Khan 2013, 6).
The line of argument here is that climate change exacerbates the intensity and frequency of natural disasters (D. Mallick 2008, Rahman and Rahman 2015), notably droughts (Pender 2008, 35), cyclones (Islam 2011, Ahsan, Karuppannan and Kellett 2011)\(^3\), and floods and riverbank erosion (Chowdhury 2016, Akter 2009b, Herrmann and Svarin 2009, 5-9); climate change is also claimed to engender so-called ‘mega-disasters’ (Rashid 2014).

**Predictability & uncertainty**

Predictability probes how key stakeholders consider uncertainty. How do their framings fill in the “blank spaces”? What are the underlying assumptions about how climate change is linked to the causality of migration? The interviews make clear that the question of ‘what causes migration’ cannot be seen as separate from the – more epistemological – question of ‘what can we know about what causes migration’. It is evident from our analysis that by far most of the contention around CC-M centres on issues that lie beyond the boundaries of today’s science, and thus outside the scope of evidence-based conclusions.

It is generally accepted that there is still a lot of uncertainty on how climate change will impact migration (Ahmed, Hassan, et al. 2012, Kniveton, Martin and Rowhani 2013, The Nansen Initiative 2015, ADB 2012). Broadly speaking, two opposing positions can be discerned (Table 4). The simplistic framing that climate change’s multiplier effect is self-evident from today’s migration trends and future models is contested by the complexity framing contending that evidence remains ambiguous at best and contradictory at worst, therefore warranting prudence rather than leaping into conclusions. So far the empirical evidence on the migration-climate change nexus in Bangladesh is weak (Marshall and Rahman 2012).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SIMPLICITY</th>
<th>COMPLEXITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CC-M link = Obvious &amp; unequivocal</td>
<td>CC-M link = Complex &amp; ambiguous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indeterminable yet self-evident &amp; common sense</td>
<td>Indeterminable plus link can be counter-intuitive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The interviews and key stakeholder documents indicate that two issues are key to uncertainty in understanding CC-M framings. The first relates to the complex, multifactorial decision making process that precedes migration, whereas the second pertains to the inability to accurately determine the sensitivity of existing environmental drivers to the impact of climate change.


\(^3\) Ahsan, Karuppannan, & Kellett claim that “the frequency of cyclones in Bangladesh has increased more than five times compared to the last three decades,” and hereby cite a World Bank report (World Bank, 2000). No such mentioning is found in the latter source however (Ahsan, Karuppannan, & Kellett, 2011).
The decision to stay or not to stay takes into account many factors, such as the likelihood of natural hazards, available resources, and social networks. It is constrained or incentivized by micro-level characteristics like gender, age, and education; and shaped by personal, social and cultural beliefs and attitudes (RMMRU 2013, Siddiqui 2010, Martin, Billah, et al. 2014, Joarder and Hasanuzzaman 2008, Mortreux and Adams 2015, Poncelet 2009, Hutton and Haque 2004, 59).

Respondent 10 highlights furthermore that people’s response to climate change impacts can be counter-intuitive, which is also argued in the literature (Paul 2005). Respondent 10 refers to a survey among floodplain dwellers conducted under his direction, to find out what they considered to be considered the ‘real’ problem and main reasons for migration. Contrary to his own assumption and the mainstream perception, floods were not considered a serious problem nor a reason to move.

When turning to the second issue, i.e. how climate change is linked to existing environmental drivers in Bangladesh, our analysis reveals a sharp discrepancy between the framing commonly found in key stakeholder literature and respondents’ perception of the role of climate change may play in ‘traditional’ environmental hazards in Bangladesh. The main thrust of the interviews, in line with the complexity framing, is sceptical when it comes to lumping all environmental migration drivers together under the heading of climate change driver.

Multiple interviewees question the prevalent framing of riverbank erosion and related displacement as representing an impact of climate change.

“River bank erosion, for instance, is it climate related? ... The water needs to go somewhere and simply grabs areas of land in its course. Is that [a result of] climate change? I don't know.” [13]

“Displacement due to erosion is a common phenomenon in Bangladesh.” [18]

Respondent 6 is of the opinion that those who attribute salinization issues to climate change-induced SLR alone are telling only part of the story.

“Hard to determine how many people are forced to migrate due to sea level rise because we currently lack exact data … uncertainty remains of how much the salinity increase is caused by other reasons than sea level rise.” [6]

With respect to water stress (i.e. droughts and floods) respondents also dismiss the climate change-centred depiction often found in key stakeholder documents. Respondent 14 contends that the growing problems of flooding in Bangladesh have little to do with climate change.

“Farmers have to deal with changeable weather patterns. … but these rain patterns aren’t causing it [i.e. extreme flooding], 92% of the water comes from outside of Bangladesh, only 8% comes from rain.” [14]

When we turn to the simplified framing, the above nuances and reservations about uncertainty appear to be discarded wholesale. The majority of key stakeholder documents, notably those of Bangladeshi (co-)authors, brackets historically recurrent environmental hazards in Bangladesh with (future) climate change hazards. The cited sources in the last two paragraphs
of the previous sub-section (under Figure 2) are all examples of this practice, which is illustrated by the following quote.

“Climate change has led to frequent floods and cyclones in Bangladesh” (Ranjan 2016, 3).

The quoted study takes it as a given that climate change is a key factor behind manifold environmental hazards in Bangladesh. Following this logic, key stakeholder research probes the climate sensitivity of mobility patterns rather than the climate sensitivity of environmental drivers for mobility, for example Kniveton, Martin and Rowhani (2013). The common practice in key stakeholder literature to equate environmental migration drivers to ‘climate change’ migration drivers forms the ostensibly logical extension of this taken-for-granted assumption. Figure 3 exemplifies this practice (Ahsan 2013). It asserts self-evidently that recent natural disasters are linked to climate change. Noteworthy here is a speech of a division director of the Bangladesh Center for Advanced Studies (BCAS), one of the country’s leading research institutions on climate change policy, who claims that “nine out of 10 [natural] disasters are now climate related” (D. Mallick 2008).

Because the effect of climate change is assumed to be self-evident, environmental hazards are now re-labelled ‘climate (change) hazards’, and environmentally-induced displacement becomes ‘climate displacement’. Examples if this are found in GoB reports (MoEF 2009, A. U. Ahmed 2006), in NGO publications (Displacement Solutions 2012, Seal and Baten 2011, Akter 2009a), in scientific studies (Nasreen, Hossain and Azad 2012), and in conference speeches (Rashid 2014, D. Mallick 2008).

The framing of riverbank erosion-induced displacement is case in point. In key stakeholder literature riverbank erosion and associated displacement is found to be axiomatically bracketed
with climate change impacts (Displacement Solutions 2012, Anwer 2012, Sajjadur Rahman 2010, Ahsan, Kellett and Karuppamnan 2014, Sharmin 2013, Klein 2015, Akter 2009a, Finance Division 2012). However, scientific substantiation of how climate change would impact riverbank erosion and associated displacement is consistently lacking. Only a few key stakeholder documents are found to highlight the lacking evidence linking the erosion process and climate change (Indra 2000, Prabhakar, Alam and Uzzaman 2009, 43).

“The monsoon floods have come early to Bangladesh, with thousands of people losing their homes and crops to river erosion, in what specialists say is a clear sign of climate change” (IRIN 2008).

A number of key stakeholder documents asserts that even if practical (and political) obstacles mean that climate change effect cannot be established yet, the prediction that more and more people will decide to move in the future in response to climate change impacts is merely a matter of common sense (EquityBD 2009, CARE 2011, Akter 2009a).

“Forced migration provoked by environmental changes is not a new phenomenon; it is rather a logic consequence of interaction between people and nature” (Herrmann and Svarin 2009, 7).

Overall, therefore, uncertainty does not impede key stakeholder documents to make strong statements about climate change impacts, as if effects had already been proven.

**Terminology**

The emergence of new vocabularies is a recurrent phenomenon in migration studies. This reflects the desire to give more visibility to a particular group of migrants that arguably underexposed by existing terminology (Vandergeest, Idahosa and Bose 2007). "There are always new words coming and going with regard to urban migration" [6]. However, the significance of the debate around labelling goes beyond the issue of terminology; scientific concepts typically link to a body of scientific research that is asserted to provide evidence for the correctness of the label. Following on from the previous sections the dichotomy centres on the specified prime migration driver (Table 5).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SIMPLICITY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Climate refugee</td>
<td>Economic migrant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental refugee</td>
<td>Environmental migrant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecological refugee</td>
<td>Environmentally-induced displacement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In-situ displacement…..etc.</td>
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</table>

The simplification of migrants in Bangladesh as ‘climate refugees’, while still kicking up considerable dust in global-level debates (Siddiqi and Rai 2013, 12), is expressly dismissed by respondents for the notion’s lack of validity on the ground. In fact, respondent 11 brushes the
whole climate refugee debate off as a non-topic in Bangladesh, the oft-quoted ‘climate refugee hotspot’ itself.

“I do not engage in a lot of the climate refugee debate. I don’t find it interesting nor useful. It is a lot of heat and no light. … I find the notion to be a very confusing, incorrect, misused term in the current context.” [11]

“Climate refugee is a problematic concept. The definition of 'refugee' is not appropriate for climate-induced displacement.” [6]

Respondents and key stakeholder documents point at the term’s problematic grounds as a legal misnomer, highlighting that fear of persecution is a necessary element of a refugee, which is absent in climate-related migration. Even in those cases where the term could arguably be appropriate – e.g. displacement due to human-induced salinization – respondent 3 asserts, you first need to be able to accurately identify the driver, which is still a long way of. These issues undermine the term’s validity in the Bangladesh context today (GIZ 2012, Laczko and Aghazarm 2009, EquityBD 2009).

All interviewees state that they never use the term themselves. A recurrent perception is that the notion is not used in ‘formal’ discussions, by which they mean academic debates or governmental documents or negotiations. Two respondents working for the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) reiterate their employer’s recommendation to employ the working definition of ‘environmental migration’, for reasons that it allows to include non-climate-related environmentally-induced migrants as well (A. R. Khan 2016).

However, some evidence of the simplification framing is nevertheless found. Some respondents point to the potency for of the climate refugee label for advocacy purposes, which can explain the persistence of the term ‘climate refugees’ in global debates. “This narrative has become a popular tagline for highlighting the urgency of climate change in Bangladesh” (Siddiqi and Rai 2013, 12). The concept has proven to be an effective tool to raise public awareness on an important yet highly complex issue. From this point of view, its simplifying nature turns into a strength.

“The term 'climate refugees' is used in Western media to draw attention to a complex issue. The notion could represent a simplification but might appeal to people who do not have a complex understanding of multifaceted nature of people who are moving in the context of climate change.” [5]

Bangladesh, insists respondent 11, is the last place you will find climate refugees.

“Climate refugees exist solely as a discourse. Today, the concept is detached from reality. [11]

A respondent, who is closely affiliated with BCAS, vehemently opposes the doom narrative that typically goes together with the notion climate refugees in global debates.

“It is just not true, it’s a false picture that they represent.” 4

4 Respondent’s number is not mentioned for anonymity reasons
When scanning for evidence of the simplified framing, it becomes evident that the contentious ‘climate refugees’ is not as absent om key stakeholder circles as respondents perceive it to be; neither in in policy papers (EJF 2011, Ahsan, et al. 2011, CDMP II 2014, 9).

“…frequent disasters might trigger out- migrations from impacted rural areas and create ecological refugees within Bangladesh” (A. U. Ahmed 2006, 30).

Nor in scientific publications (Ranjan 2016, Rashid and Paul 2013); nor in so-called ‘formal’ discussions, as is evinced by two Bangladeshi scholars, who most emphatically employ the concept ‘climate refugees’ in their speech on climate change in Bangladesh – interesting sidebar: among which Mallick D., the division director of the above-mentioned BCAS (Rashid 2014, D. Mallick 2008).

It is observed the prominence of ‘climate refugees’ in title, summary and/or introduction does not necessarily reflect the actual relevance of the term in the document itself, a Brot Für Die Welt-commissioned study on ‘climate refugees’ in Bangladesh is a good example of this (Anwer 2012). Moreover, the terms ‘climate refugees’ and ‘environmental refugees’ are typically used interchangeably in stakeholder literature. Although the GoB recognizes status of ‘environmental refugee’ and not ‘climate refugee’ (MoEF 2009).

“…sea level rise could result in the displacement of millions of people - 'environmental refugees' - from coastal region” (MoEF 2009, 1).

Secondly, many reports have dropped the term ‘refugee’ adopted other terminologies instead seeking to capture the nature of involuntary environmental-related migration without the attached controversy (CDMP II 2014, 28).

When we turn the attention to the first half of ‘climate refugee’, the label ‘climate (change)’ emerges from the data as a catch-all term the use of which is expanding. The trend among proponents of the simplified framing to bracket Bangladesh’ manifold environmental problems of the past with today’s climate change issues means that arguably pre-climate change events are now framed as speaking for an impact of climate change. Moreover, so too is the pertaining evidence: an extensive collection of environmental migration literature is now appropriated by climate change science. Several key stakeholder documents are found to read (environmental) migration literature of the 70s-80s, notably Brown’s milestone work (Brown 1976), as though they self-evidently relate to the (then still to emerge) issue of climate change and related migration (Anwer 2012, D. Mallick 2008, Ahsan, Kellett and Karuppannan 2016).

“Brown used the term of Environmental Refugee to attribute the emergence of addressing displaced people forced by environmental degradation and impacts of climate change” (Mehedi 2010, 2).

**Time frame**

Time frame involves the period of time taken into consideration. Key stakeholders, by dint of treating events within a certain time span, attach differing weight to past, present, and/or future to understand and address the issue at hand.
Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has been quoted that most climate change migrants “would seek migration, and they would be from LDCs moving within their borders, or beyond, and such movements would cause social disorders, political instability, cross border conflicts, and upheavals” (The Daily Star 2010). Sheikh Hasina’s quote epitomizes the pronounced future conditional tense invoked by the simplicity framing. The practice to use the future as basis for present-day action, for example in the form of scientific scenario modelling, is facing headwind from critics who highlight the historically-grown and context-contingent nature of so-called ‘climate change issues’ as well as today’s migration patterns in Bangladesh. In the complexity framing, historical processes and today’s state of affairs take precedence over arguably tenuous scientific models (Table 6).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SIMPLICITY</th>
<th>COMPLEXITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outspoken future outlook and tense</td>
<td>Targets primarily actual processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Predictions key element</td>
<td>Problematizes future predictions for lack accuracy &amp; usefulness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future as evidence for today’s claims</td>
<td>Historicizing present process;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present-day as part of future</td>
<td>Considerable attention paid to historical processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preceding historical developments not considered</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Respondents are by and large critical of what are seen as mere speculative guestimates of future migration. For example, respondent 15 questions the expediency of modelling the future impact of climate change on migration. He stresses that these projections have repeatedly turned out to be wrong due to unanticipated reactive factors.

“Climate change does not follow a consistent and constant linear path. … Changes in natural ecosystems can both induce and mitigate the gravity of CC impacts. The outcome of this interplay in the future is impossible to predict.” [15]

The GoB-based CDMP is also noted to pay considerable attention to criticisms of future estimation research, especially in regard to the estimates’ inaccuracy and underlying faulty assumptions (CDMP II 2014). Respondent 15 exemplifies this critical standpoint.

“Climate refugee projections are based on an unsophisticated, overly-simplified approach to the complex interaction between hydrological and social processes.” [15]

What are currently perceived to be climate change vulnerability and related issues in fact have a long pedigree tracing back to (long-)standing development and environmental problems in Bangladesh. For example, the GoB State of the Environment report asserts that a major contributor to Bangladesh’s environmental problems should be sought upstream in India, Nepal and China, where interventions in the ecosystem end up enhancing the magnitude of natural disasters, like flooding and flash floods, downstream in the Bay of Bengal (DoE 2001, 97).
In response to a question about the role of India’s hydro-dams vis-à-vis what he was calling “climate-induced drivers of migration”, respondent 11 elucidates that salinity intrusion and growing water stress are not some novelties that emerged in the wake of the rise of the climate change issue.

“The dam predates climate change and has had major impacts, particularly on the Sundarbans and on the water supply in coastal areas. Sea level rise exacerbates it. It is not the only problem, but it is an additional problem in terms of saline intrusion etc.” [11]

Respondent 16 highlights that patterns of forced displacement existed even before climate change became an issue. What’s more, he implicates that the GoB, arguably unintentionally, reinforces the displacement trend.

“Farakka Barrage was implemented in June ‘75 and within a month the salinity had increased tremendously … They [i.e. the farmers] started changing to alternative livelihoods, one of them was shrimp farming. Shrimp farming started to become a profitable business in the late 70s. At the same time the GoB started encouraging entrepreneurship. … As consequence, the big gangsters, particularly the land mafias, started pouring into that area and grabbed lands of the poor people, displacing the poor people.” [16]

Adherents of the complexity framing advocate the need to first examine pre-existing mobility patterns and livelihood systems in order to understand how climate change impacts migration. It is from this perspective that the authors discern clear parallels between the increase in migration and innovations in the field of transportation and innovations (Etzold, Ahmed, et al. 2015). Another noteworthy insight generated from an historical perspective is the role of the legal system regarding land tenure “in creating the social vulnerability of millions of floodplain inhabitants” (Hutton and Haque 2004, 42, Lewis 2011, Paprocki 2016, Nadiruzzaman 2012, 101-104).

Respondent 10 gives another example of historicizing present migration patterns when stating that “today’s urban migration is a consequence of how things are going in Bangladesh”. Urban migration, he argues, is simply a corollary of major cities’ economic attractiveness, which he in turn attributes to centralized nature of power in Bangladesh.


It is noteworthy that the GoB is an important party in the area of international (future) climate change modelling as well as related policy discussions in the IPCC and elsewhere (Climate Change Cell 2009, Climate Change Cell 2009, Climate Change Cell 2006, A. U. Ahmed 2006, A. Uddin 2006, CDMP II 2014).

The contentious notions ‘climate refugee’ and ‘environmental refugee’ typically go together with a future tense, as they are mostly used in context of migration scale projections (Pender

“Over 35 million will be climate refugees in Bangladesh by 2050” (D. Mallick 2008).

“Bangladesh is expected to have massive environmental displacement [...] The growth in environmental displacement is found to be 42% of the total populations in 2020, a startling fact indeed” (Akter 2009a).

Respondent 11 acknowledges that the link between climate change and environmentally-induced migration is still tenuous, rendering the use of ‘climate refugees’ problematic. Nevertheless, he empathically asserts to have the future on his side: it is only a matter of time before carbon-induced climate change’s is unequivocally proven to reinforce natural hazards and associated displacement in Bangladesh.

“I'm talking about future migrants, who will be climate refugees. In the next 20-30 years, we can almost certainly attribute the {forced} movement of about 10 million people from coast to inland, to climate change.” [11]

"My interest is in the future where there is a very clear attribution” [11]

That future, continues respondent 11, is already starting today.


Respondent 10’s perception that Bangladesh is already experiencing the adverse impact of climate change today is shared by very few interviewees – only respondent 2 and 19 expressed similar convictions. In the sampled texts, however, the notion of climate change being a reality today appears to prevail.

“As an evidence of early climate change, people along in the coastal zone bear testimony to rapid erosion of coastal islands, which may be attributed to aggressive wind-wave interaction with the coastal shorelines under a higher sea surface temperature regime” (Mehedi 2010, 5).

“Climate change is no longer something to happen in the future, it is here and now” (MoEF 2009).

“Climate change is now a reality” (Rahman, et al. 2007).

“It is a slow process, a ‘slow onset doom’. … In some ways, it is happening already because people are migrating.” [9]

“Sudden increase of large-scale migration because of climate induced human displacement” (D. Mallick 2008).

The pronounced future outlook is precisely what distinguishes a climate change lens from a development lens.

"The future dimension that you need to start thinking about now and then planning about." [11]
“CC-projects ... development projects, work very similarly although there are small changes. The difference is that CC-projects are much more planning towards the future and calculating in hazard.” [15]

Respondent 15 adds that in practice ‘future’ is conceived as ‘near future’.

“CC [policies] focus on near future changes, which can be predicted quite accurately. Initiatives today do not anticipate on predicted events over 50 years.” [15]

Solution framing

Lastly, a problem-framing suggests (a) particular solution(s), and often by inference who is responsible for solving the perceived problem. The simplification of rural-urban migration as involuntary displacement, thus essentially negative, will lead to policy that seeks to halt rural out-migration. A positive framing of rural-urban mobility patterns as a tried and tested livelihood strategy that holds potential for effective climate change adaptation, is predisposed towards measures that support migration. Moreover, proponents of the simplified framing argue that Bangladesh is not causing climate change and therefore demand action, in the form of financial and technological support, from the developed countries to help reduce displacement and migration in rural areas. Advocates of the complexity framing, on the other hand, assert that it is not (solely) a matter of more external funding and technology but that the ‘real’ solution lies in internal reforms, i.e. a nation-wide urban policy and decentralization of governance and economy.

Table 7 Solutions in simplistic/complex CC-M framings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SIMPLICITY</th>
<th>COMPLEXITY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Address problem</strong></td>
<td><strong>Address problem</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✶ Reduce “bad” rural out-migration</td>
<td>✶ Facilitate “good” migration &amp; steer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by making rural areas more attractive;</td>
<td>migration to regional cities not Dhaka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>urban ‘deterrence policy’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>External solution</strong></td>
<td><strong>Internal solution</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✶ Demand funding and technological</td>
<td>✶ Internal policy reform:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>support from industrialized countries;</td>
<td>Nation-wide urban (development) policy;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New international convention for</td>
<td>GoB decentralization governance and economy;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>protection of climate change-related</td>
<td>Invest rural DRR where</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>displacement</td>
<td>possible and proactive planned relocation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>where impossible in long-term</td>
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</table>

Respondents from all four key stakeholder categories markedly agree when it comes to the solution required to tackle Bangladesh’ urbanization issues in the coming age of climate change. Two key elements keep cropping up. First, the imperative to facilitate what is described as ‘good’ migration, in order for it to end up enhancing people’s resilience rather than undermining it.
“[Migration has] lots of potential to make people more resilient so they are able to cope and overcome the impacts of climate change. But what we see is a big risk that they end up in climate change-vulnerable slums.” [1]

Supportive polices should target both temporary migrants, which is primarily mentioned in the context of income diversification (Ahsan 2013).

“Temporary migration … aimed at income differentiation. … This type of migration is very important and should be supported, it enhances people’s resilience.” [1]

“Diversification of livelihood income {within families} is already rising in BD. This way the problem will get much more manageable.” [10]

Second, steps towards permanent resettlement of people living in climate change-vulnerable areas should be taken too (Displacement Solutions 2012, MoEF 2009, Percot 2012). Several respondents maintain that the GoB should proactively develop a country-wide (urban) policy to steer migration away from Dhaka to regional centres. Respondent 11 spells out what such national urban strategy should do exactly.

“So what I want is to enable them to migrate at their own pace, at their own will, to where they want to go. ... It's a good thing, they will be better off, economically better off.” [11]

“So we need the next 10 million, who are going to come anyway, to not come to Dhaka. Ultimately, you cannot force them to not come to Dhaka. You have to persuade them ... [T]he solution for Dhaka, is to not invest in Dhaka. Rather to invest in 5-10 other cities, away from the coast. ... So, it’s about steering urbanization and investment in urbanization which will enable us to successfully manage that migration.”

The strategy implies a far-reaching decentralization of power in Bangladesh’ traditionally highly-centralized system of governance.

“Decentralization of power is key … to ameliorate migration and urbanization problems. … boost the economy of regional cities so they become more attractive for migrants, so they are less likely to come to Dhaka.” [12]

Respondents repeat that the central government remains the only obstacle.

“Officially, [the GoB] does not take an anti-urban migration position. Look at their policies … They acknowledge the phenomenon. … But they think that an urban policy that improves the living conditions for slum dwellers … will end up promoting migration to the city.” [17]

Current policy concentrates specifically on rural areas. Respondent 10 and 11 challenge the effectiveness of the GoB’s rural initiatives to discourage people from going to the Dhaka.

“If there is labour shortage then there is no point to discourage people to come to Dhaka.” [10]

“You can't scare people off to come [to Dhaka]. That will happen by itself. It is a comparative advantage situation. You can't force it.” [11]
One recommendation is the planned relocation of people out of highly climate change-vulnerable areas, which is also highlighted in key stakeholder literature to hold potential as a positive adaptation measure which can reduce the vulnerability of, especially poor, displaced people (Akter 2009b, Uddin and Basak 2012, Rabbani, Shafeeqa and Sharma 2017)

“Too many people are living in vulnerable areas. Out-migration is the only solution here … but this is only a partial solution because the poorest lack resources to emigrate.” [1]

“Sea level rise makes out-migration an inevitability in coastal regions. We need a proactive policy to stimulate positive migration, which gives a positive impact on people’s well-being and resilience … instead of making them more vulnerable.” [1]

Respondent 17 challenges the helpfulness of a climate change lens to solve problems of urbanization.

“Ideal scenario [is that] urban planning gets taken as starting point. [Climate change] is not always the best lens, because conditions differ between regions, between cities. … [should be] based on the local context.” [17]

So, what are the solutions proposed by the simplified framing? Three points are central here. Firstly, halting/reducing migration to the cities, secondly, demanding compensations, in the form of financial and technical support, from the industrialized countries, and thirdly, calling for a new international convention for protection of climate change-related displaced people.

The GoB comes forward as the main driving force behind the simplified solution framing, seeing that its programs are predominantly centred on rural areas and it strongly advocates loss & damage compensations on the international stage. In the international negotiations doom scenarios of mass climate change-forced displacement play a key role, as demonstrated by the above quoted by Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and other speeches of prominent Bangladeshi politicians (Foreign Secretary Haque 2015). Considering that the industrialized world’s historical responsibility for the vast majority of greenhouse gas emissions, argues respondent 11, it is simply a matter of ‘the polluter pays’-principle.

The validity of the demands for an externally-provided solution hinges on the time frame in the simplification framing, namely to attribute present and past problems of (urban) migration and displacement retrospectively and implicitly to the adverse impacts of climate change. This is an often-found argument in grey literature (Islam 2011, Mehed 2015, EquityBD 2009, Akter 2009a). In addition, the GoB has what respondent 16 describes as “a rural bias”. Although several of the sampled GoB documents adopt a holistic approach and mention the need to address urban issues as well as rural ones (CDMP II 2014, Climate Change Cell 2008), many governmental policy and action plans – often implemented in cooperation with and with funding from international donors – nevertheless focus predominantly on vulnerable rural areas (Water Resources Planning Organization 2006, EKN 2012, DMB 2008).

Bangladeshi actors, furthermore, are at the forefront of the campaign for a new legal protection regime “to ensure social, cultural and economic rights of the ‘climate change induced forced migrants’” (EquityBD 2009, Titumir, Kabir and Baten 2012, Ahsan 2013).
DISCUSSION – DEPOLITICIZING MIGRATION & CLIMATE CHANGE

Having established what key stakeholders say and write regarding the six descriptors, the following discussion probes why they say and write what they say and write, i.e. how the findings may fit into broader strategies. The interviews proved invaluable here, since it was the opportunity to ask questions like: What is the underlying aim of the identified framings? What direct goal(s) do other stakeholders pursue and with what intention do they do so?

First of all, the interviews corroborate the conclusion of Stojanov et al., who found that Bangladeshi experts convey a complex, nuanced perception of the (urban) migration-climate change nexus in their country (Stojanov, Duží and Kelman 2015). We found that this also applies to non-Bangladeshis working in Bangladesh. The grey literature, by contrast, shows that these nuances are often not reflected on paper. This apparent inconsistency between the spoken complexity framing and the written simplistic framing could indicate that written documents serve specific interests other than understanding the complexity of migration.

The simplification framing has a pervasive influence on the written narrative from all four key stakeholder categories. The simplified framing essentially revolves around shifting responsibility, firstly, for causing and/or continuing the problem, and secondly, for providing its solution. It is generally agreed that climate change is caused by humans, notably the industrialized world (IPCC 2013). In this reasoning, due to its position at the climate change frontier Bangladesh’ problems now become part of the (industrialized) world’s problems too (Lewis 2011). The below quotes of respondent 11 illustrates the climatization of urban migration issues.

“What climate change does is adding a very different dimension to the problem, [a] new dimension that allows to revise old problems in a new light. … Climate change should be seen as an opportunity instead of a problem.” [11]

"Now you have to say ‘the world is also responsible for protecting Bangladesh’, because the world is causing the problem. [11]

The findings thereby corroborate the research by Grant et al., who demonstrate a similar trend in Bangladesh with regard to natural disasters. They advance that the practice of framing disasters as being caused by climate change, which the authors label ‘climatization’, is focused on “ensuring international financial aid and deflecting responsibility for improper action or inaction” (Grant, Tamason and Jensen 2015).

The GoB operates as a frontrunner in promoting this simplified narrative on the global stage. Bangladeshi actors, both governmental and non-governmental, often centre their speeches at international conferences on simplistic depictions for lobby and advocacy purposes. Respondents paint the GoB’s strategy for citing climate change whenever Bangladesh’ urbanization and migration issues are raised as a manoeuvre to gloss over its own failures and responsibility to address these issues. Instead of directing efforts to design a national urban policy and transfer power and resources to local governments, respondents criticize the GoB for solely focussing on attracting (more) international funding.
“When you look into the discourse … the GoB says that Bangladesh is the victim of sea level rise and climate change. Therefore, they ask money from the polluter, the West.” [16]

Paprocki argues that GoB’s case in international loss & damage negotiations hinges on linking Bangladesh’ variety of problems to climate change (Paprocki 2016). The gloom and doom narrative around (future) climate change-induced migration serves as leverage of the GoB in international negotiations.

“It empowers Bangladesh to demand money in the form of compensations, which have no demands attached.” [15]

“It is no longer charity, its responsibility.” [11]

We also encountered the criticism that the GoB documents focus exclusively on migration in the form of involuntary displacement induced by sudden onset extreme weather events (Siddiqui 2017). For example the National Strategy on the Management of Disaster and Climate Induced Internal Displacement (NSMDCIID) “focuses solely on internal displacements caused by climate-related disasters” (Siddiqui, Towheedul and Akhter 2015, 6). For respondent 1 this is no coincidence, since in the case of migration due to extreme weather events push factors arguably outweigh pull factors. In this case the link to climate change is most likely to be proven first.

Respondents assert that the reduction of rural-urban migration to weather-induced involuntary displacement obscures other factors driving migration such as economic inequality, unequal power relations and bad governance. Respondents further reproach inadequate and badly-maintained DRR infrastructure for much of the damage and displacement caused by natural disasters today. Respondent 16 is more outspoken when he discards the position that climate change is to blame for the large-scale destruction caused by cyclone Aila in 2009.

“Aila was not a very strong cyclone, it was one of the weakest cyclones in history, in fact. All the damage, all the people displaced, it was not due to the cyclone, but due to structural failure. The embankments were simply very inadequate and in poor shape.” [16]

Climatization is not the exclusive practice of governmental actors but, according to (most) interviewees, the prevailing money-attracting strategy across all four key stakeholder categories. Respondents 17 elucidates the underlying rationale for downplaying or omitting other (human) drivers of migration and persisting uncertainties about the migration-climate change.

“Climate change has triggered a new global awareness. New efforts at national and international level. We should grab this momentum. In this regard, climate change can be considered a positive development.” [17]

The phenomenon of urban migration in Bangladesh is thus dramatized to mobilize awareness and action. Li has shown that engaging simplifications as part of advocacy agendas can be

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5 Cyclone Aila was classified as a category-1 cyclonic storm, the lowest category on the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale (NASA 2009).
successful to raise public awareness, but “offers a problematic basis for justice” (Li 2002). The most contentious concept of ‘climate refugee’ is a powerful attention-getter for Bangladesh’ migration and urbanization issues. Nevertheless, in line with Li’s conclusions respondents say that the practical and legal usefulness of this simplification for enhancing Bangladeshi migrants’ well-being has been negligible.

As described in the section ‘terminology’ the simplification framing gains credibility by means of two strategies which draw on the past and the future respectively. Firstly, our study finds what can be described as a climate change teleology, i.e. the bracketing of (past) environmental migration literature with today’s climate change migration research in both peer-reviewed papers and key stakeholder documents on CC-M.

Secondly, proponents of the doom and gloom narrative are “using he future as evidence” (Brun and Blaikie 2016, 213). The discursive concept ‘future’ plays a pivotal role in climate change discourse. Prediction models of future climate change and migration trends are deployed as leverage to enforce present demands in on-going negotiations and serve as basis for large-scale investments in projects and programs. It is in the future, assert proponents of the simplification framing, that the climate change-centred framing of migration will prove itself right. Respondent 11 exemplifies the broadly-shared assumption among notably Bangladeshi key stakeholders ‘to have the future on their side’.

“My interest is in the future where there is a very clear attribution.”

"The storm surges of today and tomorrow are no longer ‘God-given’ or ‘natural events’ … is a human element of causation. We don't know at the moment how much percent this is. We will know that in the future.” [11]

Present-day policy making and investments are being drafted based on future models of migration and climate change. Although in these future modelling studies themselves caveats regarding inaccuracy are made, these are not taken into account in the policy documents (Wesselink et al. in press).

“Estimates indicate investments … would cost more than $2.4 billion, … These estimates can serve as a prototype of the adaptation costs to extreme weather events in climate negotiations” (Dasgupta, Huq, et al. 2011).

Geopolitical sensitivities are occasionally raised in interviews as another motive for climatization. Respondents argue that Bangladesh’ weaker geopolitical position vis-à-vis India impels Bangladeshi stakeholders to obscure the asserted real roots of environmental degradation and ensuing migration in Bangladesh, i.e. India’s hydro-dams that induce droughts in Bangladesh, and exaggerate the role of climate change instead. Geopolitical constraints would thus be another motive for (Bangladeshi) key stakeholders to adopt the simplified framing of urban migration.
CONCLUSION

In line with migration studies’ findings, respondents generally use the complexity framing when interviewed and dismiss the simplified framing as inadequate. The occurrence of the simplified framing in speeches and documents intended for a wider audience (i.e. beyond the key stakeholder debate in Bangladesh) corroborates the conclusion that the simplified depiction of Bangladesh’ migration and urbanization issues is primarily used for advocacy and lobby purposes.

The key stakeholder documents show that climatization works in subtle ways in Bangladesh. The simplification framing plays primarily on popular – but nonetheless unsubstantiated – assumptions that climate change induces environmental hazards and thereby reinforces rural-urban migration patterns. Environmental drivers and extreme weather events are often self-evidently labelled ‘climate change-induced migration drivers’, even though the link between climate change and the drivers of migration, as well as the link between these drivers and peoples’ migration decisions remains ambiguous. As evidence remains inconclusive today, the proponents of the simplification framing find their case bolstered by the many ominous predictions of climate change and migration in Bangladesh.

The simplification framing centres on relocating responsibility for the problem and thereby for solving the problem. Climatizing urban migration issues in Bangladesh draws in the industrialized countries, which are demanded provide financial and technical support to Bangladesh since they are to blame for climate change. Proponents of the complexity framing counter this narrative arguing that external support should only be secondary, and instead prioritize the need for Bangladesh to get its own house in order. These respondents argue that more donor money is pointless if current funds are not well spent.

The line of argumentation for the simplification framing appears to be that “a truth with a twist is not by definition a lie” if the result is a positive impact on Bangladesh. Furthermore, climatization tendencies in regard to urban migration in Bangladesh have the appearance of taking the path of least resistance. In light of geopolitical sensitivities regarding key contributing factors (i.e. India’s interventions in the hydrological ecosystem) the worldwide momentum around climate change is taken as an opportunity to address migration and displacement issues through a less contentious lens.

Nevertheless, a ‘big if’ remains when talking about climatization of migration. Do the means do indeed justify the ends in this case (Grant, Tamason and Jensen 2015) Can ensuing policy be effective in dealing with Bangladesh’ growing urban migration and urbanization issues if it does not address (all) the real issues, issues that pre-date climate change and/or exist independent of climate change? These two questions beg further examination and scrutiny. The simplification framing is likely to lead to policy that is inadequate for dealing effectively with the manifold issues migration and urbanization issues that Bangladesh faces, now and in the future.
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### APPENDIX

#### Table 8 List of respondents

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<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Origin</th>
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<th>Expertise</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Bangladeshi</td>
<td>University department director</td>
<td>Disaster &amp; vulnerability studies</td>
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<td>Business consultant donor-funded program</td>
<td>Pro-poor &amp; rural market development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Bangladeshi</td>
<td>Business consultant donor-funded program</td>
<td>Pro-poor &amp; rural market development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Bangladeshi</td>
<td>University professor &amp; donor advisor</td>
<td>Environmental economics</td>
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<td>Bangladeshi</td>
<td>Department director INGO</td>
<td>Climate finance governance</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Bangladeshi</td>
<td>Resource &amp; information manager INGO</td>
<td>Public policy</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Bangladeshi</td>
<td>Program director INGO</td>
<td>Pro-poor policy &amp; women empowerment</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Bangladeshi</td>
<td>Policy &amp; research officer IGO</td>
<td>Migration, environment &amp; climate change nexus</td>
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<td>9</td>
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<td>Migration, environment &amp; climate change nexus</td>
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<td>Development economics</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Bangladeshi</td>
<td>Director research institutions</td>
<td>Climate change-development nexus in development countries</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Non-Bangladeshi</td>
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<td>Good governance &amp; social development</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Non-Bangladeshi</td>
<td>Policy advisor embassy</td>
<td>Water management</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Bangladeshi</td>
<td>Director research institution &amp; affiliate GoB ministry</td>
<td>GIS, natural resource management &amp; climate studies</td>
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<td>15</td>
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<td>Floods &amp; floodplain management</td>
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<td>16</td>
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<td>Critical geography Disaster, CC &amp; development</td>
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<td>Migration &amp; development nexus</td>
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<td>19</td>
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<td>GoB National project director</td>
<td>DRR policy &amp; climate change adaptation</td>
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## Table 9 Interview guide

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