

# Understanding Causes and Consequences of Rural Urban Migration in Developing Countries: Bangladesh Perspective

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the migration patterns of Bangladeshi rural residents to various cities throughout the country, with a particular focus on Dhaka. Despite easy access to slums, several factors contribute to rural people commuting to towns, including poor economic conditions, inadequate education, and a lack of opportunities in the agricultural sector to absorb a large labour force. This research identifies the key underlying factors, including natural disasters and calamities, poverty, socio-political and geographical issues, and the search for better jobs and incomes, among others. This study also found consequences of people's movement to the capital city, including urbanisation, environmental degradation in the city, difficulties with basic amenities and housing, and the burden of a huge population. Which impacts the livelihood of both migrants and non-migrants positively or negatively? This paper employs a qualitative method of social research, with a purely descriptive analysis.

## 1. Introduction

Rural-urban migration is a common phenomenon in developing countries like Bangladesh, and it is a significant driver of rapid development. It occurs primarily in search of better living conditions and happiness (Mastak, 2010). Many Bangladeshi households rely on migration for their livelihood and survival, especially rural-urban migration (Ullah, 2004). Age, sex, caste, occupation, marital status, schooling, and other factors affect migration (Millington, 2000). It can be an internal or external migration. People typically migrate to Bangladesh's two largest cities, Dhaka and Chittagong. Dhaka, on the other hand, is the most appealing city to the people of Bangladesh's rural areas. The causes and effects of rural-urban migration are numerous. In Bangladesh, people migrate for various reasons, including work opportunities, increased income, service transitions, and family reasons. Sometimes, natural hazards are the primary causes of migration as well (Biswas et al., 2019). A study conducted by Biswas et al. in 2019 found that a large number of male migrants (85.3%) move to cities primarily to find jobs, while female migrants (64.8%) move for family reasons. Female migrants have been increasingly active in income-generating

activities in recent years, mainly due to a surge in garment-making in Dhaka and its suburbs (Rachel & Mobarak, 2015). Dhaka has undergone rapid growth and urbanisation in recent years, with rural-urban migration being the most significant factor. Therefore, the aim of this paper was to understand the causes and consequences of rural-urban migration in developing countries like Bangladesh.

## 2. Methodology

This research adopts an exploratory qualitative approach, relying primarily on secondary data sources. Given the complexity of migration studies and the diverse socio-economic factors influencing rural-urban migration, an exploratory design is considered appropriate to provide a broad understanding rather than test specific hypotheses. The study draws extensively on published books, journal articles, research papers, and institutional reports that discuss rural-urban migration in Bangladesh as well as in other developing countries for comparative insights. In addition, ancillary data has been collected from widely circulated national newspapers in Bangladesh to capture contemporary debates, policy discussions, and public narratives around migration.

The use of secondary data allows for a comprehensive overview of existing knowledge, highlighting trends, challenges, and gaps in the literature. By synthesizing findings across various sources, the research aims to build a nuanced understanding of the socio-cultural and economic drivers of migration, while also situating Bangladesh's experiences within broader global patterns. The exploratory nature of the study further provides flexibility in identifying emerging themes and connections that may not have been adequately addressed in prior studies.

## 3. Literature Review

### 3.1. Conceptualizing Migration

The process of relocating one's residence from one location to another is known as migration (Hossain, 2008). Migration is a long-distance migration from one state to another. A migrant, according to the United Nations Migration Agency (IOM), is a person who is moving or has moved across a foreign border or within a state away from his or her habitual place of residence, regardless of the person's legal status, whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary, the reasons for the movement, or the length of stay (IOM, 2020). People migrate in order to improve their quality of life by increasing their income and providing a better education for their children. Of course, there are several other factors that influence their decision to relocate. Internal migration is the method of reorganizing people's lives and, as a result, people move from their birthplace to another. Mahmood (1992) described migration as the movement of people to a foreign country for a specific reason and for a specific period of time. Meyer and Clyed (1967) differentiated between mobility, which is defined as movement within boundaries, and migration, which is defined as movement across borders.

Theoretically, there are two types of factors; push factors<sup>1</sup> and pull factors<sup>2</sup> of migration. Kothari (2002) identifies particular types of migration that are closely associated with chronic poverty.

**Table 01:** Types of Migration and Chronic Poverty

Duration	Kind of Migration	Features
Season	Seasonal labor circulation	Agricultural labor
Yearly	Contract Labor migration	Rural to urban labor migration e.g. Domestic service, mining
Working life	Temporary circulation	Rural to urban migration, international migration
Lifetime	Permanent migration	Emigration, resettlement, refugees
Temporary	Distress migration: war, natural disasters	Refugees, internal displacement, emergency

Source: Kothari, 2002

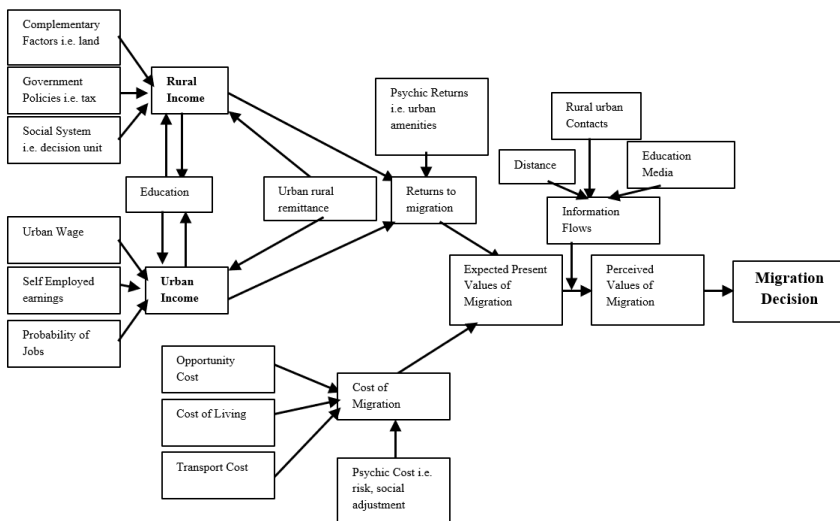
Lewis and Ranis-Fei<sup>3</sup> developed a model named the Surplus Labor model to emphasize rural urban migration. Lewis asserted in his model, the process of migration from rural to urban areas in an underdeveloped economy. He assumed the supply of labor is perfectly elastic at the subsistence wage (Bhatia, 1979). According to H. Todaro (1970), Migration is primarily driven by sound economic assumptions being made privately. Despite high urban unemployment, the Todaro model claims that migration is driven by differences in expected rather than real earnings between cities and rural areas. He asserted several factors represented in following figure that is why people takes migration decision

<sup>1</sup> Landlessness, homelessness, regular and extreme natural disasters, adverse person-to-land ratio, lack of income sources, unemployment and poverty, village politics, and so on are examples of push factors that cause people to move from one place to another.

<sup>2</sup> Pull factors are factors that encourage people to move from one place to another, such as quick access to the informal sector, job/earning opportunities, better livelihood, willingness to adjust, and so on. Positive city knowledge (garment factory jobs), higher incomes/rural-urban wage inequalities, rural-urban disparities in social infrastructure and services, and so on.

<sup>3</sup> In 1954, Lewis proposed the Dual-sector Model to describe the development of a developing economy in terms of a labor shift between two sectors: capitalist and subsistence. In 1961, Ranis-Fei expanded on his description. The Surplus Labor Model is another name for it.

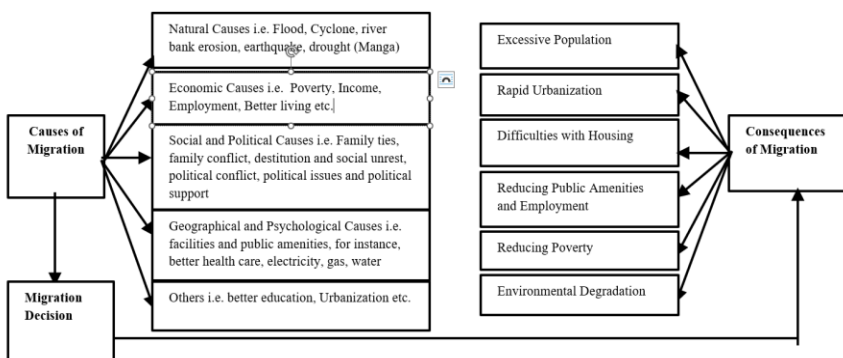
Figure 1: Todaro's Schematic Representation of Migration Decision



Source: Constructed by Author

Harris Todaro identifies the variables that influence migration, such as complementary factors, government policies, the social system, urban wage, self-employed earnings and work prospects, migration costs, and so on. When a migrant's cost-benefit analysis favors him, he migrates. However, a conceptual structure for the current research has been established based on the above theoretical interpretation.

Figure 2: Conceptual Framework of Rural Urban Migration



Source: Constructed by Author

### 3.2. Rural urban Migration: A Contextual Brief

Rural-urban migration is a frequent occurrence in Bangladesh. People migrate to Dhaka because it is a better place to follow their dreams that cannot be fulfilled in their rural communities. It is observed that migrants come from the northern part<sup>4</sup> and southern part<sup>5</sup> as well. Cumilla, Barisal, and Sherpur are the three most important places from which a large number of people arrive. The majority of migrants in urban areas (39.36 percent) come from rural areas (Ishtiaque and Ullah, 2013). Dhaka provides the best prospects for migrants because it has unique economic facilities, top administrative employment, banking opportunities, and high-quality health care, among other things. Dhaka is home to 80 percent of the country's major garment industries and 65 percent of all work opportunities (World Bank, 1999). Most notably, migrant communities are drawn to lucrative informal sectors such as rickshaw driving, sidewalk vending, and trash collection in Dhaka. Dhaka, Bangladesh's capital, is a dream destination for migrants seeking a better life. In addition, migration occurs in other Bangladeshi cities. According to a study conducted by Riad and Ahmed in 2016, the rate of migration to different Bangladeshi cities is shown in the table below.

**Table 2:** Distribution of Migrants

Cities of Bangladesh	Percentages
Dhaka City	40.8%
Chattagram City	9.6
District Headquarters	30.9
Upazila Headquarters	9.9
Other Divisional Headquarters	8.7

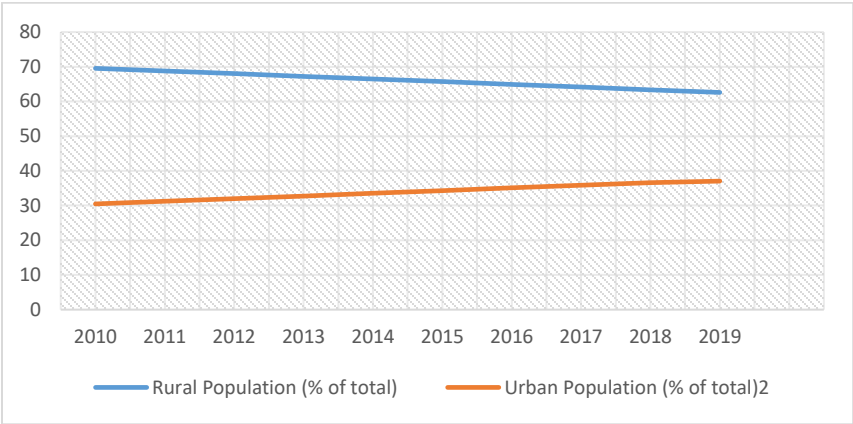
Source: Riad and Ahmed (2016)

The rate of urbanization has risen in accordance with the country's population growth. The following line chart shows a comparative growth rate of urban and rural population. And it clearly indicates the rate of population growth in urban areas is greater than the rural area of Bangladesh (Data analyzed from 2010 to 2019). If you look at the present rural, urban and total population of Bangladesh, you may get the same experience. Almost 40% of total population is belonging to urban areas of Bangladesh. Table no. shows the present population distribution of rural, urban and total population of Bangladesh.

<sup>4</sup> Northern part specially includes some districts of Rangpur, Rajshahi,

<sup>5</sup> The Southern Part specially includes some districts of Chattagram and Barisal .e. Noakhali, Feni, Cumilla etc.

Figure 3: Population Growth Rate in Urban and Rural Bangladesh



Source: Data Collected From the Global Economy.Com, Bangladesh: Population Growth

Table 3: Present Population Distribution

Categories	Number	Percentage
Rural	100524714	60.6%
Urban	64,814,953	39.4 %
Total	165,339,667	100%

Source: Data Collected from Worldometer 2020

3.3. Research Gap

In Bangladesh, rural–urban migration has been widely studied, but most research primarily concentrates on economic drivers such as poverty reduction, income opportunities, and urban labor markets. However, the broader social and cultural dimensions, including changes in family structures, community ties, and the lived experiences of migrants, remain underexplored. Furthermore, limited attention has been given to the long-term consequences of migration on both rural and urban societies, particularly in terms of social integration, service access, and quality of life. This study addresses these gaps by providing a comprehensive exploration of the causes and consequences of rural–urban migration in Bangladesh.

## 4. Results and Findings

### 4.1. Causes

#### 4.1.1. *Natural Calamities and Disasters:*

In Bangladesh, natural disaster and calamities<sup>6</sup> occurs sometimes and forces people moving from one place to another. Manga is a natural disaster that frequently strikes Bangladesh's northern area, wreaking havoc on people's livelihoods. It happens during the lean season and has an effect on agricultural activities as well as cyclical food security. Manga has a history of causing food and nutrition shortages, forcing northerners to migrate to Dhaka in search of employment to meet their daily needs (Uddin and Firoj, 2013). Another natural cause of migration is river erosion and flooding. One-third of the nation has an average elevation of 4–6 meters above sea level (Khan et al. 2004; CCC 2016; World Bank & GFDRR 2018). This land floods during the monsoon and is vulnerable to tidal inundation (SRDI 2010; World Bank 2015). It occurs on a regular basis in Bangladesh's rural areas, resulting in natural disasters that cause families to lose their homes, lands, and belongings (World Bank 2000; MoEF 2009; McAdam 2011; Mahmood 2012). According to a study conducted in 2018, 5% of people relocate to Dhaka city solely for this purpose. People migrate to Dhaka from areas in northern Bangladesh such as Lalmonirhat, Gaibandha, Kurigram, and Rangpur, which are ecologically fragile due to their position along the Brahmaputra River's river erosion belts (Mastak, 2010)

#### 4.1.2. *Economic Causes:*

In Bangladesh, there are many economic factors driving rural-to-urban migration. Poverty is the primary driver of migration to the United States. They migrate to this capital city because of the old proverb "Dhaka means taka" (Dhaka means money); however, studies show that the majority of migrants do not improve their quality of life (Titumir, 2012). Rural Bangladesh's agricultural sector does not have a lot of ability to absorb a large number of people. There is also a severe lack of work prospects. Young, qualified people are unable to find suitable jobs, while children are forced to work for a minimum wage (Haider, 2010). To help their families, many migrants seek jobs in the informal sector. Dhaka is still dominated by a wide informal sector, despite the growth of the formal sector, manufacturing employment, and other jobs. The informal sector is estimated to employ about 65 percent of the city's workforce (World Bank, 1999). Working in the informal sector has the potential to influence RUM. A large number of people work in the informal economy, which includes jobs like rickshaw driving, hawking, roadside market, junk collection, and so on. A steady influx of migrants appears to be assisted by a variety of economic activities and a wide range of facilities in the region. Unprepared for city life, a substantial portion of the migrant population is uneducated, unskilled, and unprepared. Nonetheless, they move to the city in search of a better life (Jahan, 2012).

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<sup>6</sup> Natural disasters in Bangladesh indicate floods, cyclones, storm surge, river bank erosion, earthquake, drought, salinity intrusion, fire and tsunami.

#### 4.1.3. Social and Political Causes:

Other driving factors behind migration include family relations, family strife, poverty, and social unrest. In most rural extended families, all family members depend on only one source of income to make ends meet. In this case, the sole breadwinner is forced to move to Dhaka in order to increase his income and better provide for his family. Families are often forced to relocate to cities due to social unrest. According to one report, the average number of family members is between 5 and 8, which leads to 4.8 percent of poor people migrating to Dhaka (Factors of Migration in Urban Bangladesh; Rahman Mahfuzur). Political strife, political problems, and political funding are all driving people to flee to the city because they are afraid of torture and physical abuse from the opposing party. The rate of this sort of migrant is 2% (Haider et al., 2010).

#### 4.1.4. Geographical and Psychological Causes:

Quick distances combined with increased transportation enable rural residents to migrate to towns. People from the surrounding urban area are primarily interested in transferring him to different cities, especially Dhaka, Bangladesh's capital. The best services and public amenities are offered by the city or metropolitan area, such as better health care, electricity, gas, and water. Another aspect is the proliferation of work vacancies. Rural populations are unhappy with the agrarian system, and they often migrate. Education, health care, leisure tools, play-grounds, parks, cinema halls, and other public amenities are available in Dhaka rather than in rural areas of Bangladesh (source; Economic development; Michael p todero).

#### 4.1.5. Other Factors:

People who are concerned about their children's education seek to relocate to Dhaka because of the educational institutions that are located here. Students usually travel to Dhaka to pursue higher education after completing higher secondary education (Shikdar, 2012). This is a persuasive explanation for Bangladeshi rural-to-urban migration. As a result of increasing industrialization, job prospects have increased as well. People usually move in order to obtain a desired work. Due to the expansion of the textile industry, young women are migrating to the capital city in order to work in the garment industry for a higher salary. This form of work is very easy to come by in the capital city (Al Amin, 2010)

**Table:** Main Migration Flows and Its Factors in Bangladesh

Types of Migration	Area of Origin	Destination	Main Factors
Localized Displacement	All affected regions	Cities (Dhaka)	Flood risk, monsoon
Localized	River	Often inside	River erosion
Seasonal moves to Urban areas	Rural Areas	Nearby cities, Divisional Headquarters	Need to diversify livelihoods, often main source of income
Long-term Rural-Urban	Rural Areas	Mainly Dhaka and Chittagong	Difference in labor demand, security of employment

Source: Black et al. (2013)

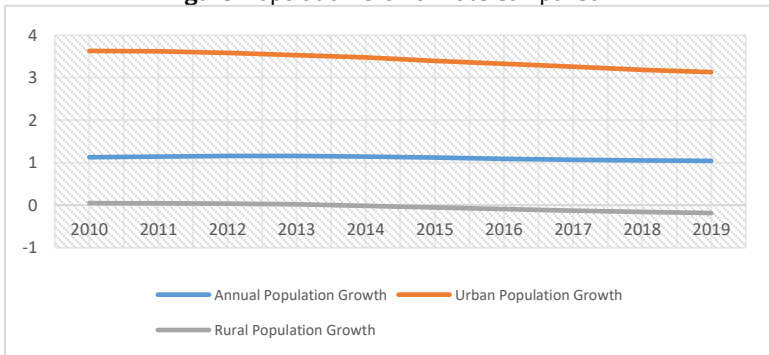


## 4.2. Consequences

### 4.2.1. Excessive Population:

Bangladesh has the fastest-growing urban population in the world. In 1990, the urban population of Bangladesh was 19.81% of the total population, which has been increased at 36.63% in 2018. Besides, others south Asian countries' scenario are like Bhutan (40.9%), India (34.33%), the Maldives (39.08%), Nepal (19.74%), Pakistan (36.67%), and Sri Lanka (18.48%) in 2018 (Nahar, 2020). Dhaka's population is growing by the day as people move in from all over the country to take advantage of the city's amenities. According to government figures, at least 1,418 people are added to Dhaka's population every day, putting the city's population at over 17 million, making it the world's densest city (Dhaka Tribune, 14<sup>th</sup> October, 2018). Rural urban migration is the main factor behind the excessive growth of population in Dhaka city. What People normally think is to get settled in the capital city, their thinking is that capital city can fulfill their needs and demand. This process always plays a vital role in increasing the population of urban areas especially in Dhaka city. The following graph indicates comparison between rural and urban growth rate of population in Bangladesh.

**Figure: Population Growth Rate Comparison**



Source: World Development Indicators (2020)

### 4.2.2. Rapid Industrialization:

To fulfill the demand of this huge population, the growth of industrialization is being higher as well. According to a 2019 survey by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, the number of such migrants working in the small industry sector increased to 11.28 lakh which was 7.38 lakh in 2012, Large-industry jobs rose to 40.27 lakh, from 29.64 lakh. Overall jobs, however, increased to 58.80 lakh from 50.15 lakh (Ovi, 2019). With the growth of jobs, the number of industries has been increased which started massive urbanization. The city's overall climate is significantly affected by the city's rapid industrialization. The ecosystem of urban areas is being destroyed as a result of this industrialization. Our Buriganga River is being affected by industrial sludge. The following table shows Bangladesh's industrial growth rate (Data is available till 2017);

**Table:** Growth Rate of Industries in Bangladesh (%)

Year	Percentage	Year	Percentage
2000	6.10%	2009	6.50%
2001	6.20%	2010	6.40%
2001	1.8	2011	7.40%
2003	1.90%	2012	9.50%
2004	6.50%	2013	9.00%
2005	6.70%	2014	9.10%
2006	7.20%	2015	9.40%
2007	8.40%	2016	8.40%
2008	6.90%	2017	10.20%

Source: Index Mundi, 2018

#### **4.2.3. Difficulties with Housing:**

It is true that there is a shortage of housing facilities, which is resulting in the development of many slums in cities, especially in Dhaka, for the rehabilitation of large numbers of rural migrants. In Dhaka district, 3.4 million people live in 4966 slums (Jahan, 2012). A single space is occupied by 68 percent of slum dwellers, two small rooms by 20%, and five percent share a room (Hossain, 2008). Migrants in Dhaka City still have a housing problem because landlords raise rents in response to high demand. This form of home is out of reach for low-income individuals. They usually strive to make do with the bare minimum in order to stay alive (Jahan, 2012).

#### **4.2.4. Declining of Basic Facilities and Employment Opportunities:**

Because of the rapid growth of population in Dhaka city caused by migration, basic facilities such as housing, sanitation, sewerage, electricity, gas, garbage disposal, and waste management are in short supply (Jahan, 2012). Bangladesh, especially Dhaka, is experiencing significant change as a result of the rural-urban migration trend. The unemployment rate in fiscal year 2017-18 was 4.2 percent (BBS). As a result, these young dependents are worried about getting a better chance of finding jobs (Nahar, 2020). When people from rural areas come to Dhaka in search of work, the existing job opportunities for native people are nominally reduced. They are now fighting for the job because a large number of people are vying for a few positions.

#### **4.2.5. Poverty Reduction:**

In Bangladesh, poverty reduction by migration is not limited to those who travel to another country for a short period of time. Internal migrants who leave the countryside for the capital, like foreign migrants, contribute to wage growth in their home villages (Ghelli, 2018). Rural-urban migration is often interpreted as a process of rural poverty being shifted to urban areas (Afsar, 2003). According to a Yale University report, the number of migrant workers moving from poor villages to cities was reflected in the number of poor households receiving cash incentives. The greater the migration of male farmers, the more households were given a Tk 1,000 (\$12) stimulus. In 2017, over 140,000 villagers were displaced (Ghelli, 2018). As people from Bangladesh's rural areas migrate to Dhaka, they may send smaller remittances to their

families. The combination of these smaller remittances would carry a larger number, resulting in a powerful tool for reducing rural Bangladesh's poverty level (Siddiqui, 2012).

#### **4.2.6. Degradation of Urban Environment:**

Housing, sanitation, sewerage, irrigation, drinking water supply, gas supply, electricity, garbage disposal, and waste management all relate to the overall physical condition of an urban area (Jahan, 2012). Due to rapid urbanization (in-migration of the rural poor to Dhaka city) and resource constraints, these services are extremely unsatisfactory and of poor quality. This massive population is wreaking havoc on Dhaka's climate, resulting in unplanned industry and factories, overcrowding, settlement expansion, and brick factories constructed to meet the huge demand of Dhaka's migrant population, all of which pollute the city's air. The air quality in Dhaka city is worsening. Inefficient waste management, odor, and contaminated canals are also factors (Ahmed, 1996). Because of the immoral occupation of migrant and non-migrant people in Dhaka city, rivers such as the Buriganga, Balu, and Turag have died. Aside from Buriganga, many industrial buildings have been built, and these buildings dump their sludge into the river, causing rapid urbanization and mass migration (Ahmed, 1996). Rapid population growth in Dhaka has resulted in deforestation and tree cutting for unplanned housing and industrial development. In recent years, the number of factories and housing buildings built for residential and industrial purposes has increased dramatically, resulting in deforestation.

### **5. Discussion:**

Bangladesh is experiencing significant change as a result of the rural-urban migration trend, especially in Dhaka, the capital city. While they are rising their food intake and improving their financial status, their health is in jeopardy due to poor housing conditions and insufficient sanitation. Market failure, price hikes, unsanitary climate, shortage of clean water, inadequate health care service, severe congestion, juvenile crime, overcrowding, and other social and economic costs of migration occur (Nahar, 2020). Migrants are typically exposed to health issues, insecurity, violence, and the unraveling of social fabric and support networks, regardless of the form of migration (de Haan, 1999, 2000; Kothari, 2002). Developing rural areas with all of the facilities available in urban areas has always been a challenge. As a labor-intensive country, fitting this large labor force into the restricted economic zone is a huge challenge. At a time when migration is increasingly growing, national attention to this problem is needed to help it grow further. A balanced rural-urban development policy must be taken place. Poverty alleviation, increased economic activity, relocating manufacturing, infrastructural growth, growing job opportunities, and providing training to improve the productivity of the rural poor are all ways to achieve balanced rural-urban development. Economic and social investments in rural areas would be useful tools, such as implementing new agricultural technologies, improving health care, sanitation, and education opportunities, expanding income-generating zones, improving the conditions of disadvantaged groups, developing youth training centers,

and providing bank loans. A reverse migration policy system would be a tool for fostering prosperity and alleviating poverty. As a result, strategic policy formulation for the rural region, rather than a skewed urban development policy, will save the country from dire consequences.

## 6. Conclusion:

This study set out to explore the causes and consequences of rural–urban migration in Bangladesh, with particular attention to its socio-economic and environmental implications. The findings reveal that while rapid industrialization and urbanization have generated employment and opportunities in urban centers such as Dhaka, they have also created immense pressure on the city’s infrastructure, environment, and public services. Migration is largely driven by strong urban pull factors, such as jobs, education, and better living conditions, whereas weak rural push factors, including lack of facilities and limited livelihood opportunities, fail to retain people in rural areas.

The analysis indicates that migration produces both positive and negative outcomes. While some migrants benefit from increased income and access to urban services, the overall negative consequences such as overcrowding, informal settlements, strain on health and education services, and rural depopulation outweigh the benefits. This imbalance underscores the need for a more holistic development approach.

The study contributes to the existing literature by offering a comprehensive understanding of the multi-dimensional nature of rural–urban migration in Bangladesh, beyond its purely economic aspects. It highlights the importance of considering cultural, social, and environmental consequences alongside economic drivers. In terms of implications, the findings call for balanced national development strategies. Policies should prioritize improving rural infrastructure, education, healthcare, and employment opportunities to reduce migration pressures. At the same time, urban planning must be strengthened to ensure cities can sustainably absorb migrants without jeopardizing the quality of life for both migrants and non-migrants. In conclusion, addressing rural–urban migration in Bangladesh requires integrated policies that balance rural development with sustainable urban management. Such measures can mitigate negative impacts, promote inclusive growth, and contribute to long-term socio-economic stability.

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