



THE FACTS



Forida Khatun stands behind her house in Gabura, Bangladesh, in November. Two of her sons migrated to Dhaka after the family home was destroyed by storms multiple times and agricultural jobs were lost due to climate change induced salinity intrusion.

"Only Allah can save us," she says. "We don't have any power to save our children."

(Image: Tim Mcdonell)

The Bangladeshi community in the UK is one of the largest Bangladeshi diaspora communities in the world and contributes significant skills and financial resources both to Bangladesh and to the UK. In addition to running 85% of Britain's "Indian" restaurants, the 600,000 strong British Bangladeshi community has four MPs in Parliament who are all women, and have overcome social injustice in the UK to become leaders in British industry, academia, and the civil service, representing the UK here and abroad.

The British Bangladeshi community played a leading political and financial role in the liberation of Bangladesh, and currently contributes in excess of GBP £2 billion in remittances to Bangladesh every year. For most British-Bangladeshis who were born after independence and have lived all their lives in the UK, they want to see the survival and the prosperity of the country of their heritage over the next fifty years and beyond, and the need for climate action is one of their primary concerns.

Sea level rise - Bangladesh sits at the head of the Bay of Bengal, astride the largest river delta on Earth. Sea temperatures in the Bay of Bengal have significantly increased, which scientists believe has caused Bangladesh to suffer some of the fastest recorded sea level rises in the world. Two-thirds of the country is less than five metres above sea level, and floods are increasingly destroying homes, crops, and infrastructure. Over twenty-eight per cent of the population of Bangladesh lives on the coast, where the primary driver of displacement is tidal flooding caused by sea level rise. By 2050, with a projected 50 cm rise in sea level, Bangladesh may lose approximately 11% of its land, affecting 13 million people, and potentially displacing over a million.

Salinisation and pollution in Bangladesh have been exacerbated by sea level rises. Coastal drinking water supplies have been contaminated with salt, leaving the 33 million people who rely on such resources vulnerable to health problems such as pre-eclampsia during pregnancy, acute respiratory infections, and skin diseases as well as increased risk of diseases such as cholera. Water pollution caused by industrial activity, sewerage, municipal solid waste, chemical fertilizers and pesticides are a routine phenomenon in Bangladesh leading to a scarcity of freshwater and resulting in displacement.

Riverbank erosion - Approximately 10,000 hectares of land are lost in Bangladesh every year to riverbank erosion, which is the primary cause of climate displacement inland. Up to 50% of people now living in Bangladesh's cities may be there because they were forced to flee their rural homes as a result of riverbank erosion. More than four million live on Bangladesh's river islands, known as 'chars', and they are particularly vulnerable because they are trapped in a cycle of poverty. These chars can be formed or completely eroded over weeks or even days due to river erosion or flooding, continuously uprooting char dwellers. Riverbank erosion is likely to become more significant under climate change, as rainfall both increases and becomes more erratic, and the melting of the Himalayan glaciers alter river flows.

Vector-borne diseases - It is expected that Bangladesh will be four percent wetter by 2050, which could lead to worsened impacts of flooding and storms and increase the prevalence of diseases such as dengue fever, visceral leishmaniasis (kala-azar) and malaria. As a consequence, the environment will become more habitable for various vector species such as mosquitoes, and while changes in temperature and humidity make carried pathogens more deadly, thus increasing the incidence of diseases.

Bio-diversity - Bangladesh is endowed with rich and diverse flora and fauna because of its location at the interface of the Himalayas and the Indus River delta. Forests cover about 17% of its total land area. The Sundarbans, the largest mangrove forest in the world, is located in the south-western part of the country, and is home to many endangered species such as the Royal Bengal tiger, saltwater crocodiles, the leatherback sea turtle, pythons, spotted deer and rhesus monkeys. Salinisation is gradually degrading the unique ecosystem of the Sunderbans. Increased rainfall has also accelerated soil erosion in the hill forests of Chittagong, Sylhet and Cox's Bazaar.

Women in Bangladesh are amongst the first to face the impacts of climate change, and their suffering is disproportionate. In the cyclone disaster of 1991, for example, 90% of the 140,000 people who died in the country were women. The situation has improved with better disaster preparedness and far fewer deaths. Cyclone Sidr in 2007 killed 3,500 but still female deaths were five times higher than male deaths. The reasons for this stark difference are many. Similar to women in many other countries, Bangladeshi women are disproportionately living

in poverty, more likely to have a poorer nutritional status, receive less and poorer-quality healthcare, and their wages are lower, making it harder to survive post-displacement. They are bound by family responsibilities, both to their children and the elderly, and therefore many remain in dangerous situations when disaster strikes.

Refugees and those without status - Those who are landless, or lack citizenship are also disproportionately vulnerable in Bangladesh. Just over a million Rohingya still live in refugee camps in Cox's Bazar and Bandarban, lacking access to services, shelter, and suffering from food shortages, infectious diseases, and poor sanitation. Their exposure to the environment is compounded by landslides, flash flooding and the impacts of cyclones due to their location in low-lying areas. Their situation is already a public health emergency and is at risk of turning into a disaster in the event of a larger-scale hazard precipitated by climate change.



Sources:

Wage Earner Remittance Inflows; Bangladesh Bank, 2020-21
Rapid Evidence Assessment On The Impacts Of Climate Change On Migration Patterns - J Selby FCDO-ODI 2021
Assessing the Climate Change Environmental Degradation and Migration Nexus in South Asia; IOM; Rabbani et al; 2017
Disaster Risk Reduction in Bangladesh: Status Report: UNDRR 2020
On the Front Lines: Climate Change in Bangladesh: EJ Foundation; Bangladesh briefing 2018
Disasters and Displacement in Bangladesh: Re-conceptualising Strategies of Risk Reduction and Resilience: IDMC 2021
Siddiqui, T. et al. Accommodating Migration in Climate Change Adaptation: A GBM Delta Bangladesh Perspective, RMMRU, Dhaka 2019
Acting on Internal Climate Migration - Groundswell Report Part 2 World Bank; 2021