



Policy Architecture to Address Disaster and Climate Change Induced Displacement in Bangladesh

This paper highlights Bangladesh's National Strategy on Internal Displacement Management, a rights-based approach to climate and disaster related displacement. It includes key elements of important international frameworks addressing displacement along with the Principles for Locally Led Adaptation. The policy, if successfully implemented, would integrate human mobility into Bangladesh's climate change policy architecture and could serve as a model for other climate-vulnerable nations.

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Tasneem Siddiqui, Md. Ekhtekharul Islam and Tamim Billah

Introduction: The need for a national strategy on displacement in Bangladesh

Despite widespread recognition that climate change is occurring, our capacity to accurately predict how it will affect human mobility is still limited. A plethora of scientific studies has repeatedly identified mass displacement and migration as among the most devastating impacts of climate change-induced flooding, cyclones, and droughts (Islam, 2022).

Recurrent and extreme weather events in Bangladesh cause widespread damage to infrastructure, agriculture, and human settlements, placing millions of people at high risk of displacement and forced migration (Siddiqui, 2022). The country is on the frontline of the overwhelming impacts of climate change due Bangladesh's socio-economic and environmental characteristics (Alam and Mallick, 2022). The [Groundswell Part II](#) report (2021) states that 19.9 million people in Bangladesh could be displaced due to climate change by 2050 if no

preventative action is taken (Khan, 2022). Additionally, the report predicts that 13.3 million people living in coastal areas could be forced to leave their homes due to salinity, rising sea levels, and other issues related to climate change (Malji, Obana, and Hopkins, 2022).

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) has identified disasters and climate change as the main drivers of displacement and estimates that during the June to September monsoon season each year, an average of 110,000 people are displaced due to natural



Figure 1: A Community from a Coastal District of Bangladesh facing the risk of displacement. (Image by: Ekhtekharul Islam, 2022)

disasters by floods and cyclones (IDMC, 2023). The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) has also highlighted Bangladesh's vulnerability to climate change, with estimates of future mass displacement of 13 to 40 million people due to sea level rise (IOM, 2022). The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) projects that sea level rise will result in significant displacement of people in Bangladesh, particularly those living in the southwestern coastal areas (Anwar et al., 2022).

Such mass population movements already seriously impact the country's economy, employment, food security, agricultural resources, national unity, and livestock, and will likely worsen. The immediate dangers and shocks of climate change and disaster disproportionately affect marginalized and disadvantaged groups, including women, children, people with disabilities, and members of racial and ethnic minorities (Chowdhury et. al., 2019). Ample evidence in the literature indicates

that the needs of displaced persons and persons at high risk of displacement are largely unaddressed at present (Regasa & Lietaert, 2022). A meta-study of 36 mobility-related studies in Bangladesh concluded that “the human rights-based support for IDPs envisaged in the Guiding Principles for Internal Displacement (OHCHR, 1998) and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 (UNDRR, 2015) – preventative interventions pre-displacement; protective interventions during displacement; and durable solutions post-displacement – was generally not on offer” (Miron, 2023). Therefore, it is imperative that the government tackles displacement through appropriate initiatives and ensure adaptation.

This article now looks specifically at policy initiatives intended to address displacement resulting from climate change and other disasters in the country.

Toward an Integrated Policy Architecture

Bangladesh’s significant progress in disaster risk reduction and climate change mitigation and adaptation over the past two decades has been globally recognized (Chowdhury, Rahman, & Abubakar, 2021). By transitioning from traditional relief and rehabilitation approaches to a comprehensive disaster risk management system, the nation has become a model of how to mitigate the damaging effects of climate change and disasters (Hossain et. al., 2020). Bangladesh has taken several steps to reduce the impacts of catastrophic events, such as disaster risk reduction strategies, early warning systems, and neighborhood-based disaster preparedness initiatives (Chowdhury, Rahman, & Abubakar, 2021).

In terms of national policy, by the end of 2022, Bangladesh had achieved a lot. In addition to addressing climate change mitigation through its [Nationally Determined Contributions](#) plan, it finalized and adopted the [National Adaptation Plan of Bangladesh \(2023-2050\)](#) (NAP) and the [Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan 2030](#) (MCP), thus addressing both mitigation and adaptation (Huq, 2023).

The Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan focuses on five thematic areas: bridging existing climate plans, a transition toward renewables, creating efficient and greener energy hubs, providing access to global funds, and investing in the country's youth (Ahmed, 2021). However, the MCPP's strong focus on infrastructural development, supported by massive technological advancement in the transport, energy and agriculture sectors (Irfanullah, 2021), may add a new dimension to existing climate change adaptation problems: the potential to leave many unskilled or poorly skilled workers unemployed.

The National Adaptation Plan of Bangladesh (2023 – 2050), on the other hand, aims to adopt and implement long-term integrated adaptation activities to combat climate change in Bangladesh, with a major focus on resilience (Dhaka Tribune, 2023). However, [as has been observed elsewhere](#) (Miron, 2023), the NAP does not explicitly include a rights-based approach to addressing the overarching issues of displacement, although internally displaced persons (IDPs) and potential IDPs will certainly benefit from some of the initiatives included in the NAP.

The National Strategy on Internal Displacement

Against this backdrop, the country has adopted a framework to address climate change and disaster-induced migration and displacement, considering the needs and obstacles of vulnerable populations. A comprehensive, rights-based [National Strategy on Internal Displacement Management](#) (NSIDM) (hereafter referred to as 'Strategy') was drafted and adopted by the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR) in 2021 with the support of the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU). Subsequently, MoDMR also adopted an Action Plan to implement the Strategy in 2022. The Strategy and Action Plan focus solely on internal displacement caused by disasters and climate change-related events.

The Strategy and Action Plan incorporate the country's national goal of a "safe, climate resilient and prosperous delta", as envisaged in the [Bangladesh Delta Plan 2100](#), the [Perspective Plan 2041](#), and the [8th Five Year Plan](#). Furthermore, all relevant global policies and protocols were

reviewed and appropriate ideas were adopted to fit Bangladesh's context. International policies and protocols integrated into the Strategy and Action Plan include the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Guiding Principles for Internal Displacement, the Nansen Principles on Climate Displacement, the [Principles for Locally Led Adaptation](#), the [Principles for Nature Based Solutions](#), and the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Strategy and Action Plan were devised through a bottom-up community-based consultative process designed to build consensus on the development of a protection agenda that addresses the needs of people displaced within national borders and across international borders in the context of disasters and the effects of climate change. Communities include people who have either been displaced or are at risk of displacement; representatives from NGOs like the Bangladesh Red Crescent; journalists, religious leaders, and local government representatives; and representatives of civil society organizations (CSOs) such as the Center for Policy Dialogue (CPD).

The Action Plan has three major focus areas addressing different phases of displacement: *Prevention of Displacement*, *Protection During Displacement*, and *Durable Solutions*. This comprehensive approach to addressing all phases of displacement is what differentiates the Strategy from the vague references to displacement in other Bangladesh policy frameworks. The Action Plan includes concrete initiatives that cover all segments of the society as well as local and global stakeholders. Relevant initiatives were developed in the following areas to support the three major phases of displacement:

- Understanding risk and decision-making support
- Strengthening climate/disaster risk governance
- Investing in disaster risk reduction (DRR) and climate change adaptation (CCA)
- Creation of employment through encouraging decentralization of urban growth centers – through the development of resettlement sites near the economic zones of emerging cities

- Climate-disaster risk responsive land use plans and programmes
- Protection during displacement
- Protecting the fundamental rights of disaster and climate-induced IDPs (DCIIDPs) during displacement
- Return to places of origin with the support of government stakeholders
- Local integration
- Resettlement

In these areas, a total of 479 actions were proposed in the Action Plan.

Salient Features of the National Strategy on Internal Displacement Management and the Action Plan

- 1) As mentioned earlier, the Strategy and the Action Plan are based on the Guiding Principles for Internal Displacement, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and the Sustainable Development Goals. A major strength of the Strategy and the Action Plan is that these policies carefully address each of the stages of displacement mapped out in the Guiding Principles - Prevention of Displacement, Protection During Displacement, and Durable Solutions (return, integration, resettlement).
- 2) Additionally, a major strength of the Strategy and Action Plan was the participatory approach to their development. Figure 2 shows the participatory research tools that were used to formulate the Strategy and the Action Plan.



Figure 2: Process for formulating the Action Plan (RMMRU)

- 3) In order to draw on the knowledge of researchers and practitioners from the global community, an international advisory group was formed. The role of the international advisory group was to guide the process to make the Action Plan rights-based, inclusive, and participatory.
- 4) The National Strategy for Internal Displacement Management is a novel strategy and policy innovation. Bangladesh is one of the first Climate Vulnerable Forum member countries to adopt such a framework. The Strategy and Action Plan not only addressed global protocols but also took cultural considerations into account. Through photovoice methods, communities were empowered to share their needs and demands in an innovative process. Their thoughts were subsequently shared in local and national level workshops for triangulation.
- 5) The Strategy acknowledges the need for adaptation programs to support individuals who have been displaced by climate change or disasters, such as providing housing, employment opportunities, and essential services like healthcare, education, and social protection. It also calls for the decentralization of urban growth as an opportunity to expand IDP deployment opportunities.
- 6) Furthermore, it recognises voluntary migration as an appropriate adaptation technique in certain situations as it can reduce the risk of

displacement and provide individuals with the opportunity to move to safer or more resilient areas.

- 7) The Action Plan proposes international labor out-migration, under the guidance of government agencies, as an adaptation strategy for vulnerable countries, and proposes lobbying for this in the international forums like the Conference of Parties (COP) or United Nations General Assembly (UNGA).
- 8) Lastly, the Strategy emphasises that these adaptation measures must be tailored to the distinct needs and preferences of IDPs, while upholding their rights and respecting their dignity. It includes some innovative and unique interventions such as impact-based forecasting, youth participation in infrastructure monitoring and surveillance, locally appropriate flood forecasting, local employment generation, smart agriculture, community empowerment through capacity exchange, social media for DRR, smart data collection methods, and smart governance mechanisms.

Conclusion

The recently adopted Action Plan to implement the National Strategy on Internal Displacement Management highlights coordinated and coherent actions that, if implemented effectively, will culminate in greater community resilience. The Strategy and its Action Plan have integrated global human rights principles and good practices and has been formulated in a way that is locally suitable and culturally appropriate. It has proposed actions that combine initiatives from the fields of disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation, climate change mitigation and sustainable development.

In closing, we would like to highlight several challenges and opportunities.

First, implementation of any policy requires coordinated, coherent, and collaborative actions between government and nongovernment agencies. The Strategy and the Action Plan highlight the collaboration of relevant stakeholders, governmental and non-governmental, in implementing the proposed actions. These policies will open avenues for

much greater collaboration between government ministries and agencies, including both large and small NGOs who have been working around the country.

Second, implementation of the strategies and actions will require a massive budget. These policy documents have incorporated innovative funding mechanisms engaging public and private sectors. They specifically highlights how a well-structured corporate social responsibility policy framework can bring private sector investment into DRR and climate change adaptation.

Third, the year 2023 has the potential for new global approaches, rather than more limited national approaches, to tackling climate change and its impacts. New forms of global diplomacy and collaboration need to be developed by youth activists, diplomats, businesses, NGOs, and researchers. In light of this, the Action Plan has proposed industry-academy collaborations for curriculum development, skill programmes, capacity sharing events, and vocational training involving local, national, regional and global actors.

In this era of information and connectivity, global efforts are fundamental to achieving the goals of sustainable development. The Strategy and the Action Plan can be considered a model for other vulnerable countries where there are imminent and long-term threats of displacement due to climate change.

Tasneem Siddiqui is a Professor in the Department of Political Science, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh, and the Founding Chair of the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU), Dhaka, Bangladesh. Email: tsiddiqui59@gmail.com

Md. Ekhtekharul Islam is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Environmental Science and Management, Independent University of Bangladesh, and a Research Fellow at RMMRU. Email: ekhtekhar.islam@gmail.com

Tamim Billah is a Research Associate at the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU), Dhaka, Bangladesh. Email: tbillah92@gmail.com

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