

COVERSHEET

Surviving on their feet: charting the mobile livelihoods of the poor in rural Bangladesh

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Recent studies of migration in Bangladesh and elsewhere suggest that the poorest are the least able to move and, as a result, have less opportunities to improve their livelihoods. This paper describes the initial findings of a study of sixteen villages, in eight different ecological zones, in Bangladesh. The findings suggest that many of the poorest have very mobile livelihoods out of necessity rather than choice in order to survive, and these are people who are not reached by government social protection schemes or NGO development programmes. From the old without family to care for them who become itinerant beggars in their last years of life to divorced women refused refuge and support by natal kin who labour in the houses and fields of others, the poorest can be found on the move in Bangladesh. Some do better their lot by migrating alone to work as rickshaw pullers, garment workers, barbers, beggars and housemaids. Others, often forced by drought, flood or religious/ethnic tension, move from place to place in family groups working as agricultural labourers or on construction sites. These are people missing from official village lists and from NGO 'baseline surveys of the poor', whose varied lives and livelihoods do not suit the static programmes of development interventions and thus remain dependent on their own ability to move on, and survive. The action research phase of this PROSHIKA research programme on the Livelihoods of the Extreme Poor is exploring how the mobile livelihoods of the poorest can be accommodated in NGO development interventions and thereby supported.

Migration, mobility, livelihoods, extreme poor, Bangladesh

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For a few days in early February 2003 world-media attention focused on a group of 213 people stranded for a week on land between India and Bangladesh. India alleged these people were illegal immigrants and that they had been rounded up by Bangladeshi authorities and deported to India. International media reports¹ said that the Indian authorities claimed that this group, who are snake charmers, were deported because they were a minority group of Muslims who in addition to following Islam, worship a Hindu snake goddess. After the flurry of media interest, highlighting deteriorating relations between Bangladesh and her powerful neighbour, Bangladesh took the group back and the story faded. The pictures of the huddled migrants, stuck between the two borders without shelter, were reminiscent of the many poor people² who move around Bangladesh and sometimes cross back and forth to India in search of a livelihood. Such a dramatic forced migration as that of the 'snake charmers' which catches the world media's attention is unusual, but the movement of people is not. Many people in Bangladesh move each day in order to survive and make a livelihood. Many people, particularly those who are physically strong and fit, literally survive by keeping on their feet, going where work can be found. Others move because they, like the snake charmers, have to leave due to political, social or religious pressure. Natural disasters also often play a part in forcing people to migrate.

Kothari (2002: 7) in a comprehensive review of migration and chronic poverty discusses how 'chronic poverty is a causal factor in decisions to migrate or

¹ *The Economist* February 8th-14th 2003, page 68.

² Some of these particular migrants were said to have proved their residency by showing electricity bills from Bangladesh, so they were probably not the poorest of the poor, perhaps just unfortunate people in the wrong place at the wrong time.

not and paradoxically can also be a situation that is created or reinforced through the process of movement, both for those who move in and those who remain.' Some have argued that the poorest do not migrate, because they do not have the resources to do so. Indeed Kothari remarks (2002:4) 'many of those who are chronically poor are those who have stayed in an environment where others have left'. This observation is supported by a recent study by Kar and Hossain (2001) of the Chars in Gaibandha District, Northeastern Bangladesh.³ They showed that the less poor shifted from place to place minimising their risk and making the most of new opportunities on the unstable but fertile land. The poorest had nowhere to go and by staying put risked losing what little they had. But not everyone who is poor is similarly immobile. Recent research, for example, in Andhra Pradesh (Samal 2003) has found that some of the very poorest become so desperate that their only means of survival is to bond themselves to a contractor in the hope of getting something to survive on. A survey of 1600 households conducted by the Livelihood Monitoring Project in Northwest Bangladesh found that seasonal migration is an important livelihood strategy for the very poor. They found that nineteen percent of households across the wealth groups migrate in the lean season. And, importantly, in the case of always-poor households, it is one of the major strategies for almost a quarter of those households (2002: 47).

³ Chars are sand and silt bars or islands which appear and disappear as a result of the fluvial process in the major rivers of Bangladesh. There are two types of chars, attached to the mainland and unattached (islands). Discussion on chars usually includes land and populations living on or to the river-side of embankments, since these areas may become char land and populations in these locations are often former char residents.

We should not be surprised to find conflicting findings on whether the poorest do or do not migrate because the poor are not homogenous, so it is difficult to generalise about the characteristics of the poorest migrants or non-migrants. This paper builds on the overview provided by Kothari (2002) and responds to her suggestion for research which helps us to understand more about the lives of the poorest. Kothari suggests (2002: 25) that micro-level research might identify 'the various factors and motives, which compel individuals and households to leave or stay behind and how and why decisions are made'. By looking at a few case studies from the Livelihoods of the Extreme Poor (LEP) study in this paper we explore some of the factors behind the mobile livelihoods of the poorest in Bangladesh. The material in this paper is drawn from a 'Livelihoods of the Extreme Poor' Thematic Study by Hossain (2003), which describes the mobile livelihoods of the extreme poor in much greater depth.

It is important to remember that nearly all the 130 million people living in Bangladesh today are vulnerable in some way or another and their livelihood fortunes can change dramatically very quickly. A family that has struggled hard out of chronic poverty, often poverty which has been passed on from one generation to the next, can lose all they have gained because of disaster, sickness, political/social unrest or unemployment. How people cope with such vulnerability is dependent upon who and where they are and what assets they have. For the 65 million people living below the poverty line, with fewer assets to cushion the impact of adverse events, the only likely outcome is falling further into poverty and adversity. These are the livelihoods that the

Livelihoods of the Extreme Poor study findings describe, where we found ample evidence that mobility is an important factor in the lives of the poorest in Bangladesh. For some it has provided a route out of poverty, but for others it is a way of life, as they live on in a state of chronic poverty.

Background

PROSHIKA, an NGO in Bangladesh, has undertaken this study entitled "The Livelihoods of the Extreme Poor Study" in collaboration with DFID. The case studies presented in this paper come from the second phase of that study where the PROSHIKA team collected information on the lives of poor people living in 16 villages in various parts of Bangladesh.

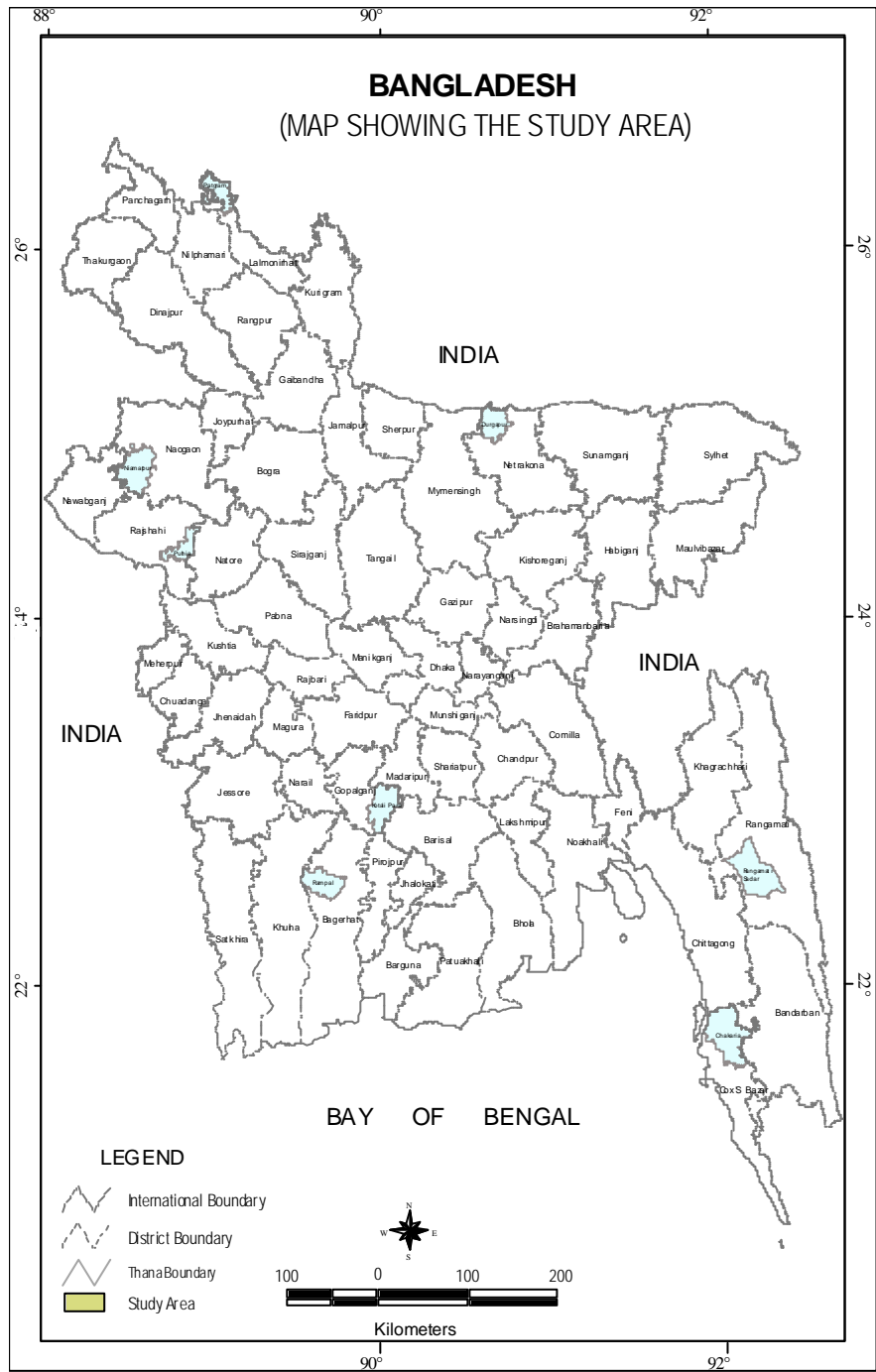
Approximately 45-53% of Bangladesh's 130 million people lives below the poverty line. Of particular concern are the 23-35% of people who live in 'extreme poverty', the majority of whom live in rural areas. As a proportion of a population, this figure is one of the highest in the world. The available evidence suggests that many development initiatives and interventions have had little impact on the extreme poor, so the purpose of the PROSHIKA study is to try and develop more effective ways of reaching these very poor people.

The study villages of the Livelihoods of the Extreme Poor project were chosen purposively to represent each of the eight broad agro- ecological zones in Bangladesh.⁴ In each zone one *thana* (an administrative unit made up of a several of villages) which, according to the PROSHIKA records, contained a

⁴ Tista Korotoa flood plain, Madhupur tract, Ganges flood plain, Meghna flood plain, Brahmaputra flood plain, Ganges tidal flood plain, Coastal plain, Barindra tract.

high concentration of the `extreme poor'⁵ was selected. Two villages were then selected from each *thana*, one close to *thana* headquarters (termed `central') and one further away (termed `remote') for detailed study.

⁵ According to PROSHIKA's definition of `extreme poor' and the PROSHIKA baseline study (see page 20-21 below).



The communities of the study areas

The largest village population of 4,597 people is found in the central village of Patgram *thana* and the lowest, with a population of 200 people, in the central village of Durgapur *thana*. The literacy rate is the highest (90%) in the remote village of Puthia *thana*; the lowest (10%) in the remote village of Kotalipara *thana*. Some occupations like small businesses, vending, subsistence cultivation, share cropping, day labouring (including agricultural labourers and other non-specific works), employment as housemaids, begging, etc. are common to all villages. But some occupations were only found in particular places during the study like butchers, blacksmiths, and shoemakers. These occupations were found in Niamatpur *thana*. Various forms of cross-border business go on in Patgram and Durgapur *thanas*. Salt production is carried out in the Chakaria *thana* and fishing is the main occupation for people in both the Chakaria and Rangamati *thanas*. Shrimp cultivation is prevalent in both Rampal and the Chakaria *thanas*. Crab fishing was found in the study villages in Puthia *thana*. *Jum* (shifting) cultivation was prevalent in the Rangamati *thana*. The hunting of wild animals, especially by ethnic/tribal people, occurs in the study villages of Durgapur, Rangamati, Puthia and Niamatpur. Some occupations like selling milk and treating cattle disease were found in Kotalipara. Van/rickshaw pulling is common in all villages, except for Rangamati *thana* (which is too hilly). The eight *thana* are quite distinctive in terms of the culture of the peoples. The ethnic group of *Santal* lives in the Niamatpur and the Puthia areas, the *Chakma* only in Rangamati. The *Garo* and the *Hajong* live in the Durgapur area. These ethnic groups belong to different religions. The *Santals* and the *Hajongs* are largely Hindus,

the *Chakmas* are Buddhists, many *Garos* are Christians. The *Bengali* live in all zones. No Hindus were found in the Patgram and Rangamati study villages. The status of women in different cultural groups is not the same. In most cases, it appears that the Muslim women enjoy less freedom to go out to public places and to work away from home than Hindu, Buddhist or Christian women. Generally in the Muslim communities, only a destitute woman is granted some freedom to work in public.

Sixty five detailed case studies and about 200 short cases were collected through interviews during visits to the villages in 2002. Background information on the villages was collected using different rapid appraisal techniques, observation and secondary sources. Out of a total of 294 people the team spoke to, 110 respondents gave information on migration. Out of the 110, 67 people were from the 'central' villages and 43 were from 'remote' villages. From the central villages there were 53 male and 14 female respondents and from the remote villages there were 31 male and 12 female respondents. Not all those interviewed were extremely poor, indeed the study team heard of people lifting themselves and their families out of poverty through various strategies including earning from migrant labour, or the acquisition of a small piece of land in another area that was distributed by the authorities to 'the poor'. But for every tale of good fortune there were plenty of stories of misfortune where migration had been caused by some disaster or other which had made the situation worse or where mobility had been forced on household members in order to survive. And for many of the poorest

families the escape from poverty was often very fragile and gains could be quickly lost as fortunes changed.

Migrants' stories⁶

A displaced person

Let's begin with the story of Mahesh Chakma a 32 year-old day labourer in the village in Rangamati thana in southeastern Bangladesh. His father had had land in another district and he had been able to educate his son.

In 1992 something happened which dramatically changed his life. That year a clash occurred between the army and shanti bahini (a militia group of indigenous chakma people) near their village. After the incident the army arrested Mahesh. The army kept him in their custody for three days and tortured him. The army then released him saying he was innocent. But after his return from the army camp something else happened. The indigenous militia group started doubting him and thought that he may be an informer of the army. They started putting pressure on him to join shanti bahini. He refused their offer. After his refusal shanti bahini threatened him. It became difficult for him to move in the locality and he was confined to his home for one year. Then in 1993 he came to Sylheti Bustee to a distant relative's home very secretly and started living there.

Mahesh married the relative's daughter and was now living in a hut on land owned by his wife's family with his wife and four children. They had no land to farm and they did not have any land at all of their own. The interviewer goes on to describe their living conditions:

He has only two lungi (men's traditional clothes) and his wife has only two saris (women's traditional traditional). They have only one straw mat for sleeping on. [...] Mahesh does not have any agricultural land. He and his family live in a one-room thatched house made of bamboo and straw. [...] His straw made roof is so thin that while rain comes, water pours on to his floor. So if rain starts at night, then they can't sleep. His children are very thin.

⁶ All the names have been changed. The case studies been compiled in a study report 'Case Studies of Poor Households' (2003). A small selection of these cases can be found on 'Livelihoods Connect' www.livelihoods.org

He maintains his household with occasional labouring work helping with fishing, although he used to be able to get some work as a tutor for some school children, but that work is no longer available. We are told by that:

Mahesh has sought government and non-government jobs several times but has failed because he does not have either a close relative in such employment to help him or sufficient money to give a bribe. A few years ago he tried for a primary school teacher position. He asked an acquaintance who was involved in the appointment for advice and was told that the officials wanted 70 thousand taka as a bribe in order to secure that job. Mahesh did not have that money, so he did not get the job.

Perhaps one day Mahesh will find work and will lift himself and his family out of their current extreme poverty. While they wait for this to happen they suffer, with most extremely poor people, the disadvantages of their poverty: they have no voice and no influence and they face insecurity and injustice frequently in their day to day life. Mahesh told how he is harassed while out fishing because `miscreants' demand tea or cigarettes from him, even though he cannot supply them. He says these people are aware that he and his family have no relatives in the area to help them. His wife's parents had moved away soon after their marriage leaving Mahesh and his wife on their tiny piece of land. Mahesh complained of being lonely because as migrants they were not fully accepted by the community and so did not have friends.

Not all migrants are the victims of harassment nor are all those the study team spoke to people who were once better off, as Mahesh said he once was in his father's house.

An old man

Moanuddin is 70 years old. He is a disabled person. He said that he used to go to Chittagong to beg because he would get more charity from there. He complained that people in his own area were too poor to give him alms. In Chittagong he used to live on the roads and sometimes on the veranda of shops. He used to eat cooking what he could buy from the alms he was given and sometimes he ate food he was given. He used to come home after one or two months with two or three hundred taka as his earnings (£1 = 93 taka). Now he does not go so far to beg because he is too blind to manage the journey.

We found many cases of old people who were too sick or disabled to move.

They were among the very poorest of the poor. But those who could move about, even if it was difficult because of disability or age, did so because they had no other means of support. They went to beg or to do some form of work in order to maintain their livelihood. Some of those who do migrate were old men living alone with no relatives nearby, or those living close to relatives who could not or would not help them. Some were landless old people living on khas (communal, Government owned) land, some had chronically ill household members and needed money for treatment and a few were old women who received no support from sons but needed money to support themselves and their households.

Women migrants

Two stories from our women respondents:

Saleha Begum is a woman of 50 years old of Bahirsimul village. Her husband is sixty years old and is mentally disturbed and not able to work. Six years ago his youngest son had died by drowning in a pond and since then he has been deeply disturbed. In order to help her household to survive Saleha decided to look for work and migrated to different places like, Gopalgonj, Kotawalipara, Madaripur. In Gopalgonj she went for work in rice processing and there she also worked as maidservant. Her brother, who worked as a rickshaw puller helped her find work in in Gopalgonj town.

Kobati Rani is 50 years old and a widow. She lives in Hatath Para. Her husband died one year back due to illness. Kobati Rani only came to this village six years ago with her husband when they migrated here as agricultural labourers. When they came they managed to get some land but that land has been sold off to cover the treatment costs for her husband. In addition, their only son is chronically ill and cannot work. With no one available to work and no relatives near to help her, Kobati Rani's situation is desperate.

Perhaps Kobati Rani, like Saleha Begum, will be forced to find work. But that is very difficult for many women in Bangladesh who may have been brought up to observe purdah and keep to the confines of the house. Not only may they not have the skills for the labour market, they may also lack the experience of the outside world, as well as the support to find work. Some young girls as well as older women like Kobati Rani and Saleha Begum are forced by circumstance to work. In Chakaria thana the team heard about a female migrant from the central village who went to Chittagong to work in a garments factory and two young women from the remote village who went to Chittagong for jobs as housemaids. One such case from the remote village is given below:

Halima Begum is a 15-year-old girl from a village in Chakaria Thana. She works as a maidservant. Her mother died six years ago of typhoid fever. Her father re-married, but lives separately from Halima and her two brothers. Her older brother is a day labourer, and the younger one is currently a primary school student in class five. Two months ago, Halima migrated to Chittagong to work as a maidservant in the house of a family; they provide her with food and accommodation, but pay only 200 taka per month in salary.

The work of 'housemaid' is often the occupation divorced or abandoned women who have to move to support themselves take up:

Aleya Banu is a 48-year-old divorced woman who lives alone in a small hut, which is her only asset. After she was forced out from her husband's home, she was in a very vulnerable state. Her husband was reasonably well off, and while living with him, she did not need to work. After their divorce, making and selling bamboo mats was a crucial part of her livelihood. However, after

buying the bamboo from people who collected it from the Sumessori river, she made very little money. She then left for Rangamati, to stay at her sister's house. After a few months there, she went to Ranirhat in Chittagong in search of work. She lived there for 12 years and worked as a day labourer on farmland, jum (hilly land), and as a house cleaner.

The more fortunate ones can fall back on the support of their families. Aleya's sister had provided her with somewhere to stay for some time, an important source of support at a difficult time.

The pressure to find regular work

Those who have the strength and health to work are often seen as better off, indeed their strength and fitness is viewed as their main asset keeping them out of extreme poverty but among those who 'live on the edge of extreme poverty' are those who despite their strength and health struggle to get regular work:

Nandu is a day labourer who lives in Nishanpur village. He has no specific work. He does whatever he can get. He is 35 years old, married with three daughters. He has a small piece of land which is not enough to support the family. So he has to sell his labour to others. He gets work on paddy land around the area in the monsoon. Generally he gets taka 50-60 for working a day. This money is not enough for him so he looks for other work. He does work like digging soil, cutting trees etc. by which he tries to earn more. He gets taka 40 in a day by doing such work. It is not common work so he can't get the opportunity to earn extra money very often. Nandu like many others becomes unemployed in the lean period so he is forced to migrate to other places like Rajshahi, Manda, Taherpur etc. where he finds work. He has a lot of problems maintaining his family and he is worrying about how he will cope with the marriages of his three daughters.

As Nandu's case illustrates, when weighing up the options available for earning money it is not only the costs of treatment and day to day living that people have to consider, but also the cost of marriage. We found a number of cases where the decision to migrate was linked directly to the need to pay

dowry. Indeed, the burden of dowry was one of the things often mentioned as a cost that forced people on the margins of poverty into poverty or deeper poverty. So strategies, like that adopted by the family of Moni, below, are not uncommon. This case is from the Patgram study area where there were six cases of temporary migration from the central village and five from the remote village. Moni is from the 'remote' village:

The second daughter of Saber Ali, Moni, is 11 years old. She has been working in Dhaka for one year, doing domestic work for the daughter of a local government member named Mojammel. She cannot send money home, but when she returns to visit her parents after a few months, she brings them clothes and some money. Saber says that a few years from now, when Moni is an adult, they will provide an amount of money, saved from the money she brings home, for the arrangement of her marriage. He said that planning for the marriage expenses is part of their strategy to survive.

Facing adversity

As noted at the beginning of this paper migration often compounds the problems for the poor, rather than solving them. During the study, the team members were told by migrants and their families of many problems they have faced at their destinations: accommodation, problems sending money home, sickness and disease, robbery (snatching money or possessions) and physical harassment. Some became sick from the migration which meant that they became a burden on return. Monsur, below, depended on his family for considerable financial support when because of sickness he could no longer travel to work and earn a living:

Monsur is 32 years old. His mother lives with him and his wife and small son. Monsur was a day labourer. He migrated to different places for work during the lean period. But now he is seriously ill with gastric problems. He says he has an ulcer. Now he is out of work most of the time, his family including his mother, are fully dependent on support from relatives. To bear the cost of treatment expenses his mother has already sold her two cows. For his

treatment he has been sent several times to Chittagong hospital, and spent more than 700 taka each time. For his treatment a huge amount of money has already been spent and the majority of his treatment cost was borne by either his own parents or relatives of his wife. The household's condition was not good before but now their position is deteriorating fast and they cannot afford food let alone his treatment.

The support of family, as in the case of Monsur, can be exhausted where households live on the margins of extreme poverty.

But those left behind also faced a range of problems while the migrant was away as well as sometimes on the migrant's return. For example: four people out of those interviewed said that their families suffered from a range of diseases while they were away. We learnt of four people who died after migration for different reasons. We heard that in some cases the villagers or kin occupied their land in the absence of the migrants. The study also revealed that some migrants have to endure physical assault or harassment.

Nine out of 79 migrants the team spoke to were victims of robbery and attack in the places when they had migrated. Some of them were mugged in the cities or towns where they came to work and others were attacked on their way home. Three examples are given below.

Basantha is a day labourer and does various types of work: catching tortoises, digging soil, and doing agricultural labour. He does different things in different seasons, but no longer goes out to other districts to find work. When he did so previously, he faced many threats to his physical and emotional well-being. Two years ago, he went to Dhaka and Narsingdi to catch tortoises, but some of the local mastans (a low-level mafia or criminal gang) stole his money and physically assaulted him. The abuse recurred, and Basantha's efforts to enlist the help of the police failed. Basantha asserts, "Police keep their distance, and only after the mastans robbed me and left the area did they come. The

police also fear them.” Due to concerns for their security, most of his fishing partners now avoid working outside their area.

Nuru is a young man of 18 years. He works as a day labourer, sometimes excavating dirt. A year ago, he moved to Cox’s Bazar with a work crew. There, the work leader secured a seven-day contract for road construction. After finishing seven days’ work, they believed that they had completed the contract as agreed; however, they received only three days’ wages. When Nuru protested, the contractors threatened his life. Nuru has faced various other hardships when he has migrated for work, such as finding somewhere to live. He has had difficulty securing accommodation, and once resorted to taking shelter on the veranda of a primary school.

Javed Mia, 32, is a day-labourer. One day, as he was taking a bus bound for Chiringa, he was attacked by a group of robbers in Harbang—an area in Chakaria notorious for crime. One of the robbers asked him if he was carrying any money or jewellery. Javed denied having any, so then the man searched his body for money. The robber searched his whole body, except for his shoes, where he had hidden the money. After reaching home, he prayed the nafal, a special prayer to Allah showing gratitude for surviving a severe crisis.

Javed was lucky. Many migrants are not so fortunate. Many village migrants are relatively inexperienced travellers and they are very vulnerable as they journey to and from work.

Forced Migration

The study found that sometimes villagers are forced to leave their villages because of natural disasters:

Baten Mia, 40, lives in the village of Krishnapur in Puthia thana,. At present, his financial situation is not good. He has no land so lives on others’ land. He faces insecurity regarding shelter, as the roof and walls of his house are made only of straw. He now works as a rickshaw driver. There are many reasons why he migrated to this village; for example, there is generally good availability of work here, and the Jamuna River largely destroyed his land and possessions in his native village. However, there are also disadvantages to living here; as he is a migrant to the area, he often feels neglected, and many people discriminate against him.

Because of his status as a migrant, he experiences many social injustices and insecurities. Recently, some young men were harassing his daughter. He called a salish (local court) meeting to seek justice in the matter, but the salish committee settled for a weak commitment involving only the men's handshakes. Baten believes the committee favoured them, as they were all familiar with each other, while he was an outsider. By living here, he enjoys greater work opportunities, but he often faces injustices and insecurities with his weaker social network.

Others had to leave for political reasons. Both religious antagonism and some local conflicts were responsible for such migration. Some face harassment because of political disagreements:

Anil, 32, lives in destitution in Jaladashpara village (in Chakaria). After the recent national elections, he was forced to leave the village by politically motivated threats. He said that before the elections, Muslims were barred from his para, or neighbourhood. Now, according to him, some "illiterate and nasty men" come there and subjugated the residents, who are subjected to daily scrutiny. In the past, any conflict in the para was mediated internally, but now the outsiders come to the area and hold salish (local courts) judiciary meetings to pass judgement. Although they may not have a thorough understanding of the disputes in the eyes of the residents, all must abide by their decisions. Before the elections, Anil was a prominent person in his para.

Another three cases of political migration can be traced back to the Liberation War when millions, especially the Hindus, sought refuge in India to save their lives. On return home some got back their property and other assets but others did not and many of these families remain in acute poverty.

Benefits from migration

There were also stories of good fortune. Baten for example, whose story is given above can find more work in his new location (although he faces other problems). Fifty one migrants said that they had found some benefit from migration. Out of the 51, 25 said that they have saved money, some had been

given food and clothes. Of those who had migrated into the study area six poor people in Durgapur and Niamatpur had been able to acquire homestead land. Some people had succeeded in improving the livelihood security of their families:

Akram is a 16-year-old boy who works in the silver business in Barisal. He is head of his household. He lives in Bahirshamul village, Kotalipara Thana, in the district of Gopalganj. He has never gone to school, and knows only how to sign his name. Akram believes his financial difficulties are the result of trying to provide for a large family. As an agricultural day labourer in his village, Akram found it difficult to cover his family's living expenses; work was not available all year round, and the wages were low. For this reason, he decided to migrate to Barisal three years ago with his uncle, and started vending plastic utensils. Initially, he bought plastic utensils from shop owners, and then sold it in the local market. This business was profitable, and from his earnings, he sent 500 taka to his mother. Two years ago, he started selling silver utensils. He bought them from his Mahajon, an employer and moneylender, for 15 poisha (100 poisha = 1 taka) per gram, and then sold them for 20 poisha per gram in the local market. This was a more profitable business, which allowed him to send 1000 taka to his mother, after paying his own expenses.

Even so things have not been easy for Akram:

Akram related the story of an incident last year, when he was returning home one night after selling utensils and two men attacked him and stole 300 taka. He said that there were also occasional problems sending money home to his mother because of not getting a trusted man.

There are enough such cases, and (sometimes exaggerated) stories of good fortune, to encourage those among the poor who can, to try through migration to better their lot. Given the struggles of day to day existence, they shrug off the difficulties faced by other migrants.

Support for migrants?

All the 110 people who gave the team information on migration had a different tale to tell. Stories of hardship and stories of success. The stories show the importance of social exclusion and social relations as well as `poverty-related

capitals' (Kothari 2002: 29) in understanding the causes and consequences of migration. Often people migrated to earn money, but some as described above, migrated because they did not fit in anymore in the places they were staying.

Because the reasons for migration, the duration and nature of migration were very varied, the study team has wrestled with categorisations of migration according to duration or type. We have concluded, with Skeldon (1997) and others, that such typologies can obscure the dynamics of migration and do not greatly aid our understanding of the migration of the poorest people. As Kothari says (2002:27)

Migration is a significant livelihood strategy for poor households. Nevertheless, the role of migration in sustaining or moving out of chronic poverty is largely shaped by the social, cultural, geographical and economic exclusions experienced by the poor. Thus, research into chronic poverty needs to be able to identify when, where and for whom migration is a key livelihood strategy and the ways in which migration plays a role in understanding chronic poverty in different societies and for different groups within them.

Because of the varied nature of migration trying to devise programmes to provide support to these mobile people is very difficult. A single type of scheme or intervention cannot fit all. What is possible, however, is to examine carefully the characteristics of the poor and destitute who migrate and broaden the scope of existing social protection interventions so that some of these people who have fallen through the net can be given support.

According to the Proshika definition of 'extreme poor' which has been used up until now, extreme poor households are those which have two or three of the following characteristics:

?? have zero-land (predominantly river erosion victims);

?? are female-headed;

?? have one or more members with physical or mental disabilities, (Sultana 2002)

Based on the findings of the 'Livelihoods of the Extreme Poor' study this definition is being expanded to include households which:

✂✂ are made up of older people (approximately over 60)

✂✂ have one or more members who are chronically ill

✂✂ are managed by children/teenagers (where a parent is absent because of migration, or a woman heading a household is unable to interact with the outside world because of purdah).

The study also highlighted the importance of paying much closer attention to household dynamics. A survey of households in a village which may have been done five or even two years ago does not accurately reflect the situation of individuals in those households now. It is apparent from the experience of the Livelihoods of the Extreme Poor study, as well as an intervention for the extreme poor presently being piloted by BRAC (2001) that involving members of the communities in ensuring up to date information is available on vulnerable households for agencies working in the villages, is an effective (and necessary) way of ensuring that those in need are not missed. In-migrants to villages often complained to the team that they were not on

`official lists'. Community assessments of the poor in the village could overcome this problem as long as the villagers undertaking such an assessment accept the migrants as villagers. The stories from Mahesh, page 6, and Baten (page 17) highlight the fact that this cannot be taken for granted, particularly if residents feel that recent migrants might take away what they perceive to be their rightful `entitlement'. Such residents may well be poorer than the migrants.

Over the next year Proshika plans further research on mobile livelihoods and work on experimenting with a `migrant support' programme, to look at ways of trying to reduce the hardship many migrants suffer as they move about but also provide support for those left behind. We can no longer design interventions which are based on assumptions about static `rural' or `urban' populations. The lines between the two in Bangladesh, as elsewhere, are blurred. The mobile livelihoods of the poorest in Bangladesh are an important part of their livelihood strategies and need to be recognised as such by Government and NGOs and supported.

Conclusion

Mobile livelihoods have long been an important factor in many people's lives in Bangladesh and will remain so as long as it is viewed as a route out of poverty. Whether migration is a route out of poverty will depend on whether a member of the household can earn a steady income from migrant labour for some of the year and can share the earnings safely with his or her family. For many of the poorest the human cost of migrating, in terms of health and security is not matched by economic gain. The question remains whether,

given the diversity of those with mobile livelihoods, effective support can be provided so that poor and vulnerable migrant groups and those they leave behind can really benefit from their mobile livelihoods and prosper rather than just (and only just) survive on their feet.

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