

# Building Climate-Resilient, Migrant-Friendly Cities and Towns

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- ❖ A number of secondary towns should be identified which could attract and absorb at least a million migrants each.
- ❖ Bottom-up, participatory approach is required to identify local needs and action plans.
- ❖ All relevant actors should play their respective role to facilitate cooperative and collaborative actions.
- ❖ Investment is needed in both human and physical domains to make these towns both “climate resilient” and “migrant-friendly”.
- ❖ Each of these towns needs to invest in manufacturing and/or services that will generate employment.
- ❖ Both public and private initiatives and investment is required.
- ❖ Central government should play the anchor role and bring all the actors on the same platform.

*Building climate-resilient, migrant-friendly cities and towns in Bangladesh has become an urgent need in order to tackle the adverse effects of future climate change. Infrastructure which can not only absorb shocks, but also attract rural people providing services and livelihood opportunities will ease the population pressure on major cities.*

## Introduction

Bangladesh has been experiencing a rapid growth in urban population during last four decades. However, this growth follows an imbalanced spatial distribution, mostly directed towards Dhaka city. As of 2011, almost 44% of the country’s urban population lived in Dhaka resulting in excessive pressure on its housing, transportation, infrastructure, and basic services (GED, 2015).

This pressure is accumulating every year as a result of rapid population influx where climatic stresses play a major role in driving people towards major cities in search of livelihood opportunities. It is projected that around 13 million people within Bangladesh are likely to be displaced by 2050, eventually migrating to Dhaka and other major cities, where climate migrants are likely to outnumber other internal migrants (World Bank, 2018). It will be difficult for cities like Dhaka to absorb this huge influx of climate migrants.

The citizens of Bangladesh should not be encouraged to migrate into major cities. Rather, they should be incentivized to move to other secondary cities

in the country. As climate change worsens, and more people are likely to migrate from their rural homes to urban centres, it is imperative that Bangladesh pursues a policy of creating climate resilient, migrant-friendly cities to disperse the massive influx of migrants moving to Dhaka.

## Addressing the Spatial Need for Development

Secondary cities provide unique opportunities in terms of geographic location and spacing of urban centres. There is an urban system in Bangladesh in terms of spacing of urban centres, with at least one secondary city in each administrative division, and a large town in each of the district towns other than the divisional headquarters. In addition to that, each of the 490 Upazilas has a small town (GED, 2015).

According to the local context and needs, each of these cities and towns need their own urban development plans addressing the climatic risks and economic opportunities. Initially, a sample of cities and municipalities need to be identified, considering their economic potentials and proximity to the climate stressed regions in order to determine if they can absorb a large number of climate migrants. Identifying at least a number of secondary towns adjacent to economic hubs, sea ports and river ports, and export processing zones can potentially attract millions of migrants who are feared to be displaced.

## Focusing on Adaptation Strategies

In the context of climate resilience, the 7<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan of Bangladesh emphasizes on the need to focus on “transformative adaptation” rather than just “climate resilience”, which implies a transformation at societal, community, and national levels (GED, 2015). Which brings us to address the situation as follows.

**In the societal level**, the problems associated with climate migrants should be seen from three dimensions, each requiring different solutions:

- **The first dimension** is dealing with the climate change impacts that are already being felt in the low lying coastal districts of the country. The government, different NGOs, and research communities are already developing different adaptation strategies for this, such as providing farmers saline tolerant seeds, rain water harvesting techniques for drinking, etc.
- **The second dimension** is time. The impacts of climate change, like salinity intrusion and sea level rise, will not happen overnight but quite gradually over several decades. This requires a two-track adaptation strategy:
  - Helping people in the coastal areas to initially cope with the existing situation.
  - Empowering young girls and boys in those areas with quality education to enable them not to become farmers and fishers like their parents, but to be able to move to towns and get better jobs for their families.
- **The third dimension** is the tendency of migration towards major cities like Dhaka. Hence, the solution to this growing population problem in major cities is to invest and attract migrants to other secondary towns.

**In the community level**, every city and municipality needs tailor-made solutions to make themselves climate-resilient and migrant-friendly. Local urban government and stakeholders know their locality’s problems the best, and thus should be tasked with identifying the needs and potentials which can be utilized to make a climate-resilient plan. There is a need for bottom-up, participatory approaches from the secondary cities mixed with top-down planning solutions. This could be done through initiating a competition for all secondary towns to submit proposals for developing resilient city plans and pilot projects at the same time. All planning should be in such a way that ensures public-private inclusiveness.

Towns and cities have tremendous potential to stimulate economic and social development, especially by creating jobs and innovative ideas and technologies (7<sup>th</sup> Five year Plan, 2016). Such potential, however, cannot be realized if cities and towns are badly managed. That is why communities, Local Government Institutions (LGIs), town planners, academia and researchers, private investors, media, relevant government departments, policy makers and central government should play their respective roles to facilitate cooperative and collaborative actions towards building resilient and migrant-friendly cities.

**In the national level**, central government should play a key role in including the concept of Climate-Resilient, Migrant-Friendly cities in its strategic documents and national policies like the forthcoming 8<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan. A National Urban Sector Policy also need to incorporate this concept which will lead to achieve one of the major agendas of Habitat III.

## Investment Needs for Making Cities both Climate-Resilient and Migrant-Friendly

The potential cities and towns identified will require investment in both “human” and “physical” domains. This means that social aspects which can improve the attractiveness of a secondary town or city must also be considered alongside the physical aspects of infrastructure and spacing to make cities more migrant-friendly and climate-resilient.

To make the cities migrant-friendly, many people need to overcome the prejudice of the host community and actors. This requires more social investments to change people’s mindset, behavior, and action.

The most important factor in attracting migrants is the provision of livelihood options, housing, education, healthcare, water and sanitation facilities, and other social services. Hence, each of these towns needs to build on their comparative economic advantages to invest in manufacturing and/or services that will generate employment opportunities for migrants. Public-Private Partnership and inclusive programme is needed to implement this new concept. In that case, government should seek technical and financial support from development partners.

Finally, the central government should be the anchor to bring all the actors on the same platform and do necessary monitoring to make this programme successful over a long term.

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### Acronyms and Abbreviations

**GED:** General Economic Division  
**LGI:** Local Government Institutions  
**NGO:** Non-Governmental Organization