ICCCAD
International Centre for Climate Change and Development

POLICY BRIEF

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# CLIMATE-RESILIENT MIGRANT-FRIENDLY TOWNS: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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## Policy Pointers

Building climate-resilient, migrant-friendly cities and towns in Bangladesh and other populous countries in South Asia has become an urgent need for maintaining citizens' well-being through tackling the adverse effects of current and future climate change.

So the governments concerned must ensure a facilitative policy-legal and institutional framework, with different types of appropriate instruments for such a model.

The National Strategy for Management of Disaster and Climate-Induced Internal Displacement adopted by the Government of Bangladesh needs to be constantly updated in view of the evolving socio-economic and climate change realities.

Civil society institutions like the ICCCAD at IUB has an important role in shaping and executing such a model as a learning-by-doing exercise, with constant capacity building at different levels, to be substantiated by action research on the ground.

## 1. Introduction

For the last few years, ever increasing climate change impacts resulting from the new normal of extreme events are becoming a rude fact of life around the world. The findings of the Working Group-1 of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) published in August 2021 again provides mortal warnings about the impending climate crisis. The impacts are particularly stark in South Asia, the most populous region on Earth. Within South Asia, Bangladesh stands as the most vulnerable: 4.1 million people were displaced due to climate disasters in 2019 (2.5% of the population), with 13.3 million people likely to face displacement by climate change by 2050, and 18% of its coastland will remain inundated by 2080 (Rigaud, et al. 2018).

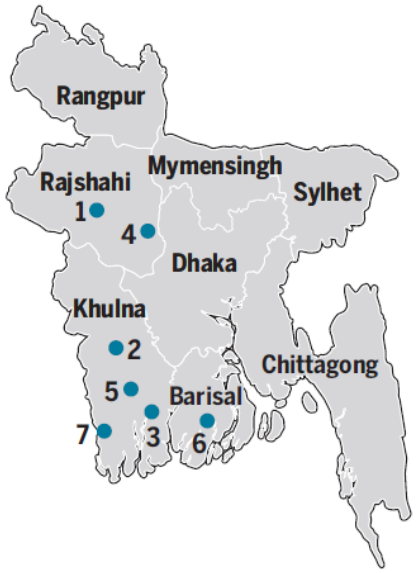
The Paris Agreement goal of keeping the temperature rise at 1.5°C or well below 2°C compared to pre-industrial times cannot be achieved, given the lack of ambitious mitigation, when we already live with 1.1°C higher temperature. As a result, the number of people estimated to be displaced by slow-onset events will stand at ~22.5 million by 2030 and ~34.4 million by 2050 in South Asia including Bangladesh (Singh, et. al. 2020).

Where will all these people go? A land area of 147,570 km2 is inhabited by 165 million people. So, Bangladesh has no space to retreat. Estimates show that about half a million people displaced by river-bank erosion move to Dhaka city alone, crowding the slums and mounting pressure on limited city services. In such a situation, one option to address displacements in a world of increasing urbanization including in Bangladesh could be the transformation of smaller towns to be climate resilient and migrant-friendly (CRMFT). This option appears practicable for populous countries like Bangladesh, having little or no space for retreat from vulnerable hotspots.

In this context, several queries can be raised: What is the rationale of the model of CRMFT? What does make a town climate resilient and migrant-friendly? What are its elements and dimensions? While responding to these queries, this policy brief attempts to design a framework for CRMFT, though it may differ across physical and socio-economic boundaries.

## 2. Why are we talking about CRMFTs?

Usually, three pathways can be discerned with respect to how displaced people are settled: autonomous relocation by families and individuals (without much government support), government-supported temporary stay in shelters, and planned relocation (Khan, et al. 2021). In Bangladesh, the first option overwhelms, followed by efforts for temporary settlement, until the government rehabilitates their former residences. Planned relocation or managed retreat in response to climate change (Carmin, et. al. 2011) is not yet happening widely because of space and resource constraints. In land-scarce Bangladesh, most of the 30+ such Chars/mudflats in the Bay are already inhabited at different degrees by people displaced by riverbank erosion and climate change impacts.




**1 Rajshahi (city)**
Provision for diversified livelihoods; training for skill development; access to health services and education.

**2 Noapara**
Investments in fish and shrimp export industries attract migrants; municipal authorities have improved water supply and drainage systems, reducing waterlogging and vulnerability.

**3 Mongla**
Investments in infrastructure projects attract migrants; government is building a vocational training institute; municipality and NGOs work to improve education and slum housing.

**4 Sirajganj**
Assessment of climate/disaster vulnerability; preparation and implementation of a risk reduction action plan at community and household levels.

**5 Khulna (city)**
Flood-resilient systems in slums; sanitation; training on climate-adaptable livelihood options; access to financial products in government-approved financial institutions and microcredits.

**6 Barisal (city)**
A baseline study is in preparation; a community-managed piped water supply network is arranged.

**7 Satkhira**
Community-led, low-cost, climate/disaster-resilient housing.

**Fig. 1: Some activities being undertaken to build migrant-friendly and climate-resilient cities in Bangladesh and their locations**

So, one way to address displacements under increasing climate change impacts in populous Bangladesh could be the establishment of peri-urban growth centers and transformation of rapidly growing towns to be migrant-friendly. Second, developing such CRMFTs, where huge economic activities are already going forward, will redirect the increasing flow of displaced peoples away from the large cities, like Dhaka, Chittagong and others, which are already overcrowded, particularly the slums and low-income housing facilities.

The NGO BRAC has initially identified about 20 towns and municipalities, considering their economic potential and climate stress, to determine whether they can absorb a sizeable number of displaced people. A number of satellite towns adjacent to economic hubs, such as relatively elevated sea and river ports and export processing zones (EPZs), can potentially employ millions of migrants. Investment in manufacturing and/or services is generating jobs through public, private, and community partnerships, such as private investments, government support, and micro-financing from BRAC and Grameen Bank.

The International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD) at Independent University, Bangladesh started facilitating this program since 2018. It has formal agreements with many ministries and agencies including the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED), the agency for building and maintenance of rural infrastructure. ICCCAD has been working as advisor and co-implementer of programs with all stakeholders, including mayors in two small towns in coastal Bangladesh, Mongla and Noapara.

Among the lessons learned from the initial practices are: (i) Vibrant economic activities in these rapidly growing towns are absorbing increasing number of migrants from vulnerable hotspots, and (ii) migrants with energy and agency are generating different small businesses, with government support and microcredits from Grameen Bank and BRAC. The fact that an overwhelming share of those displaced by climate change around the world resettle internally indicates that adaptation in-country is the most viable option. In Bangladesh, a majority of those displaced prefer non-migration from their ancestral roots (Mallick, et. al. 2021) if they are provided support for improving their livelihood, housing, etc. Settlement of displaced people in a town nearer to their ancestral home allows them to maintain psychological kinship and cultural comforts. The global community dealing with disaster displacement, including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), primarily recommends this option.

ICCCAD is helping town authorities in planning and implementing initiatives that are intended to be hospitable to incoming settlers, so that they can gradually be mainstreamed into citizenship (Alam, et. al. 2018). The process is based on a participatory, consultative process involving the municipal authorities, host community leaders, and settlers. The National Strategy on the Management of Disaster and Climate Induced Internal Displacement (NSMDCIID) includes options such as supporting livelihood for new settlers and skill development, both in displacement hotspots and in new settlements. Although these towns do not yet have adaptation plans as such, the programs consider risk-informed and socially conducive adaptation measures. BRAC with its Climate Bridge Fund is also currently implementing different programs in five cities: Barisal, Khulna, Rajshahi, Satkhira and Sirajgong. For programs under implementation in

these cities, the target groups are incoming migrants, who crowd the slums. The activities undertaken in these cities are similar, with some specific activities in each town (see figure 01). Most of the new settlers have moved from rural areas rendered inhospitable as a consequence of slow and sudden-onset climate impacts.

## 3. Components of a CRMFT

ICCCAD has been doing this programme with a strategy of learning by doing for last three years. Now it is time to conceptualize how a CRMFT looks like. It can be defined as one that is designed to absorb growing number of migrants from climate displacement hotspots, while remaining resilient to current and predicted climate shocks, without sacrificing the immediate and long-term well-being of its citizens including new settlers. On the basis of this definition, literature review, and brainstorming with stakeholders, the following six elements of a CRMFT can be discerned:

***1. Environmental:*** With the old environmental challenges, such as pollution and degradation, water supply and sanitation, etc., cities and towns are increasingly facing new challenges like commitment to SDGs, concerns about finite nature of urban resources, climate impacts, such as heat stress and flooding induced by erratic and heavy rainfall and also by coastal flooding. The town populations will considerably rise, accordingly the production and consumption patterns need to remain low-carbon and climate resilient, within the town's carrying capacity. Assessments of such vulnerabilities due to climate impacts should be regularly undertaken (Serraglio et al., 2019).

***2. Structural/Technological:*** This involves what we call hard wares - climate resilient risk-informed adaptive infrastructure, such as cyclone-resilient and green buildings, climate friendly technologies including low-cost housing, self-help house building with simple technologies, other services and amenities, low-carbon transport systems, etc. (Ayeb-Karlsson et al., 2016).

***3. Economic and Financial:*** Here the focus is on increasing investments for job creation to absorb growing number of residents including the new settlers. A focus on longer-term risk-informed investments, efficiency and conservation in use of financial resources and financial autonomy of the municipalities/pourshavas should be an integral part (Price and Chacko, 2012; Ahsan et al., 2005; Barnett and Webber, 2010). The municipal authorities have to devise fiscal and financial instruments in a way that ensure equity among different classes of residents and reduce their dependence on and enhance autonomy from the central government.

***4. Social:*** These considerations under a CRMFT involve a combination of soft-ware and heart-ware, such as slum management, genuine participation of stakeholders, sustainable services like low-cost housing, education, health, WASH issues, level of awareness, ethics and values for a low-carbon climate resilient development (LCCRD), absorption and peaceful co-existence of old and new settlers, informal dispute-resolution mechanisms, etc. The issue of just transition in view of the differential impacts of climate change, and of COVID-19 on different income groups is an important aspect of a CRMFT. Taking care of an equitable transition will ensure sustainability of the model. These two wares need to be integrated into the traditional town planning process (Serraglio et al., 2019; Price and Chacko, 2012; Seethaler-Wari, 2018; Ahsan et al., 2005; Barnett and Webber, 2010).

***5. Policy-institutional:*** A well-defined, integrated environment and climate change management regime, based on appropriate national and local government policies, plans and laws is crucial in a CRMFT model. The Government of Bangladesh already adopted the

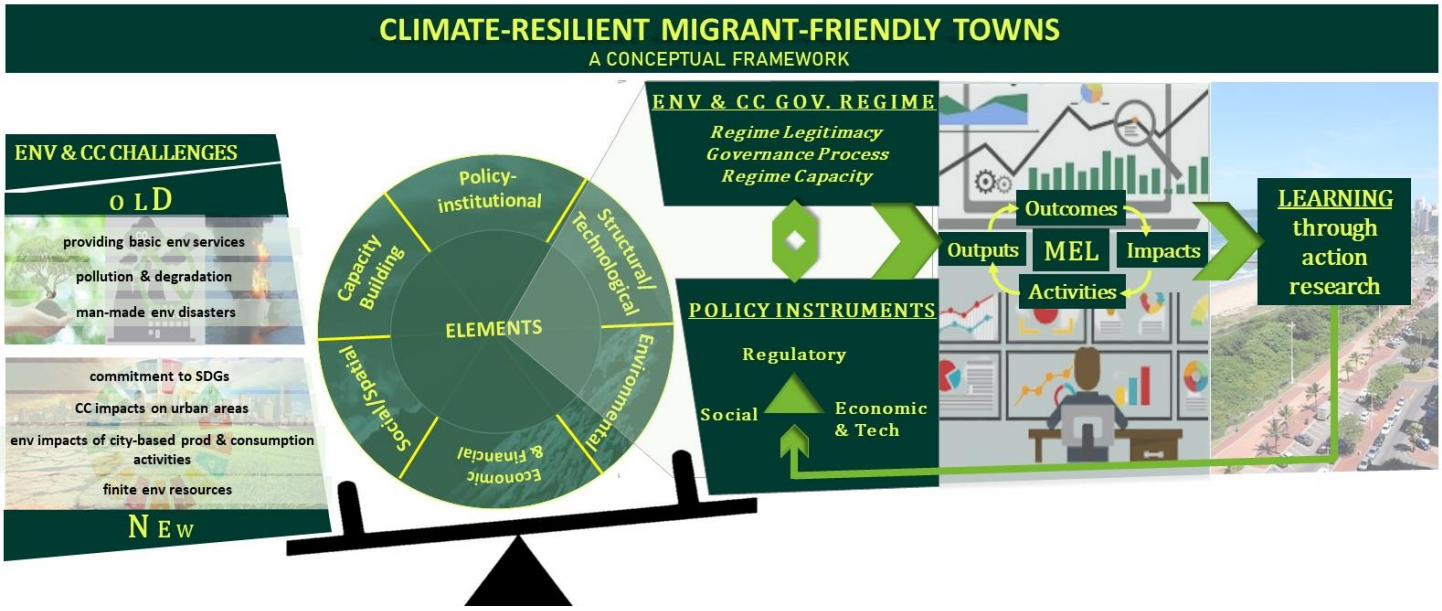



**Fig. 2: A Conceptual Framework for Climate-Resilient Migrant-Friendly Towns**

NSMDCIID, which incorporated disaster risk reduction and rights-based approaches, so that vulnerable communities can enjoy their basic rights to livelihood, food, health, and housing. Under the model, each town will need to prepare a climate resilient adaptation plan, informed by current and future climate impacts, specific to each region. These local adaptation plans must align with the town's other priorities as well as national adaptation plans. Climate-induced migration needs to be included in such plans. To begin with, series of policy dialogues need to be initiated by the town mayors and other stakeholders, and a well-designed coordination mechanism among sectors and agencies including civil society leaders must be in place. The rights of the migrants can be reinforced by creating advisory councils at the local level for the migrant communities and by providing them with voting rights in the local elections (Serraglio et al., 2019; Price and Chacko, 2012; Seethaler-Wari, 2018; Ahsan et al., 2005). Based on elaborate dialogues, appropriate regulatory, financial/technological and other social instruments can be designed for sustainable implementation of a CRMFT model.

***6) Capacity Building:*** Finally, capacity building as a cross-cutting issue is extremely important, as the policy-makers, town managers/planners, CSOs and academia do not have past experience in implementing such a model. Obviously, a learning by doing approach, substantiated by action research and reflection must be the bedrock for implementation of such a model. For this a multidisciplinary Advisory Body headed by the town mayor can be established, with inclusion of environment and climate change management experts for dealing with a variety of issues, including designing of appropriate education and training modules for different segments of the citizens.

## 4. Governance and Management Regime

Three distinct dimensions of a CRMFT regime must be addressed to attain its objectives through good governance:

- First is the legitimacy of the regime, i.e. whether the town's political/administrative regime has been elected through democratic means, based on people's choice. A freely-elected mayor and his councilors usually are better able to deliver the goods and services.
- The process by which the municipal authority exercises its management functions and manages resources. The indicators for this should be based on elements of good governance, such as rule of law, transparency and accountability, independence of local judiciary, stakeholder consultations, participatory decision-making, etc.
- The last dimension is the regime capacity and competence, mentioned above, to design, formulate and implement policies, plans and discharge functions. It may be mentioned that local governments are run, for example in Bangladesh, by both elected representatives as well as government officials. For designing appropriate locale-specific adaptation plans and their effective execution, both groups of officials need training, as this is a new area to deal with.

## 5. Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL)

A strong regime of MEL should be in place as the transformation of towns into CRMFT will be based on a phased approach, with learning-by-doing (see Fig.2). So periodic evaluation and teasing out lessons for onward journey must be an integral process.

For the purpose, a well-developed set of indicators of outputs, outcomes and impacts (both qualitative and quantitative) needs to be developed over time, based on how the model works in every phase.

## 6. Learning from better practices

In social engineering, there is usually no best practices in a dynamic world. So, while shaping towns along the CRMFT model, there is a need for learning from better practices at home and abroad. What works better elsewhere, why are they better, whether the practices are suitable and replicable in the local contexts, and means to replicate them should be a constant exercise. To achieve this, institutional changes in a city or town need to be fostered by research, planning, design, and capacity building. Examples from cities like Durban, Quito, Semarang, and Malé indicate that they may need to develop general as well as sector-based strategies to manage effective climate change adaptation. This warrants the linking of adaptation planning and implementation to city priorities. Cities must have access to reliable information and opportunities to share experiences through local, regional, national, and international networks (Weerasinghe, et. al. 2014).

## 7. Way Forward

In view of the discussions above on the need for and practicality of a CRMFT in populous nations like Bangladesh, this policy brief sketches out a framework, based on ICCCAD's experiences of working with few towns as well as with BRAC for the last few years. It attempts to capture the basic elements and dimensions of designing, governing and implementing the CRMFT model. Proper planning and execution of such a new model requires attention and support from both national and international ends. This pioneer initiative is meant for raising debates nationally and globally, so that the model of a CRMFT can be dynamically reshaped in view of evolving socio-economic realities against increasing climate change impacts.

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