

Reducing disaster risks and strengthening resilience of displaced people

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Bangladesh is one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world because of its geographical location and population density, resulting in high levels of exposure and vulnerability. Tropical cyclones, flooding, storm surges, drought, riverbank erosion, landslides, salinity and water logging-all these displace large numbers of people from their homes and lands almost regularly in the country.

Crops and livestock struggle to survive in climate change 'hotspot' areas where conditions become often too cold and wet or too hot and dry threatening livelihoods, leading to food insecurity and many other accompanying problems. Limited natural resources, like drinking water, often become scarcer in many areas. People try to cope with the changing environment, but many get forcibly displaced or are relocated from their homes because of the impacts of climate change and disasters.

Considering the scale of disaster displacement and its massive humanitarian consequences in the country, effective and inclusive disaster risk reduction must be adopted to prevent both individuals and communities from becoming displaced. Recognising the possible risks and hazards of natural disasters and ensuring that the country and communities are robustly prepared helps to prevent displacement and respond resiliently when displacement occurs. To address this issue, clear understanding in terms of potential hazards, disaster displacement risk, appropriate systems to collect, analyse and share disaggregated data on displacement are needed to develop pragmatic roadmaps and an effective implementation strategy and action plan.

Disaster displacement risk in Bangladesh has quadrupled since the 1970s, largely because exposure has increased without a corresponding reduction in vulnerability. Greater exposure has primarily been driven by rapid, unplanned urbanisation that concentrates people in hazard-prone areas. Other drivers include weak governance that permits or even encourages settlement in unsafe areas, made worse by lack of access to resources during disasters, conflict and violence affecting people's resilience to potential risks.

Bangladesh has taken a lot of initiatives and achieved significant success to make disaster management system effective and efficient. Mortality reduction is the most important outcome that the country has achieved in terms of effective disaster management. But the recent trend of disaster displacement is alarming.

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) predicts that weather-related hazards are expected to become ever more frequent and intense in the days ahead because of the impacts of climate change, which in turn increases vulnerability and displacement. Provisions to reduce disaster displacement risk, respond to disaster displacement and strengthen the resilience of people displaced by disasters should be included within wider efforts to embed disaster risk reduction (DRR) in relevant laws, regulations and policies. To reduce the risk, it is essential to designate roles and responsibilities for addressing disaster displacement and other related forms of forced human mobility in order to facilitate coordination and ensure that designated authorities have adequate legal and administrative authority and institutional capacity. Ensuring sufficient financial assistance and human resource, meaningful participation of displaced people by disasters, those at risk of displacement and displacement-affected communities in the design of DRR plans, strategies and laws, and capacity building initiatives at all levels is very important to achieve durable solutions.

After the devastating cyclones in 1970 and 1991, Bangladesh has made commendable efforts to reduce its disaster vulnerability and is thus considered a global leader in coastal resilience. Despite these efforts, vulnerability is still on the rise due to adverse impacts of climate change.

Climate displacement poses humanitarian and human rights challenges for the Government of Bangladesh (GoB). The government and all stakeholders must act collectively to protect vulnerable communities against displacement, respond to the humanitarian needs of climate displaced persons and resolve climate displacement in a manner that guarantees durable solutions.

Achieving durable solutions to disaster displacement cannot simply be equated with getting the displaced people to return to their homes. Rather, it is a process through which the displaced people will slowly rebuild their lives until they no longer have needs related to their displacement. This includes regaining access to livelihood opportunities, finance, housing, education and healthcare that they lost during displacement. The presence of these would in turn strengthen their resilience to future hazards.

Integrating Disaster Risk Management (DRM) into development planning and investments in Bangladesh will better protect people and assets from rising disaster impacts. The engagement of private sector can also be explored for finding durable solutions to disaster displacement. Integrating DRM into development planning is likely to protect people and assets from increasing disasters impacts.

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