
Sajid Karim

HUMAN SECURITY PERSPECTIVE OF ENVIRONMENTAL MIGRATION IN BANGLADESH: A CASE STUDY OF SATKHIRA DISTRICT

Abstract

Environmental factors are becoming increasingly influential in people's decision to migrate. As a disaster hot spot and one of the most climate-vulnerable countries, environmental migration is becoming a hard reality in Bangladesh. When these vulnerable people reach their destinations, they are exposed to a spectrum of human security concerns. The paper, based on a case study of the Satkhira district in the southwestern coastal region of Bangladesh, explores the human security concerns of environmental migrants and offers suggestions to improve the situation. Drawing data from both primary and secondary sources, the paper examines the concept of human security under three basic pillars—freedom from fear, want, and indignity—and identifies lack of food, water, health, and environmental security, fear of violence, abuse, exploitation, lack of dignity, humiliation, discrimination, and right to self-determination as main concerns of environmental migrants. To improve the situation, the paper suggests a set of recommendations for both state and non-state actors that it believes will help devise policies and strategies conducive to protecting environmental migrants in Bangladesh.

Keywords: Environmental Migration, Displacement, Climate Change, Human Security

1. Introduction

In today's world, migration decisions are not just influenced by economic, social or political reasons but also by environmental factors such as climatic events

Sajid Karim is Research Fellow, Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS), Bangladesh. Currently, he is pursuing PhD at the University of Dundee, United Kingdom. His e-mail address is: sajid@biiss.org

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and stresses, environmental degradation, natural disasters, resource scarcity, etc.¹ Both sudden-onset disasters like floods, cyclones, mudslides, and other severe weather conditions, along with slow-onset events including drought, sea level rise, river bank erosion, ocean acidification, rising temperature, degradation of ecosystems and biodiversity, and salinity intrusion, are contributing to human migration and displacement.² The world saw a record number of people displaced by disasters in 2022, with 32.6 million people forced to flee their homes, which is 8.9 million more than the previous year.³ A World Bank study in 2021 found that water-related factors were linked to a ten per cent increase in total migration within countries between 1970 and 2000.⁴ According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM)'s prediction,⁵ around 200 million people will be displaced due to environmental factors by 2050, and this number could potentially increase to one billion beyond that year. The Global Risk Report 2022⁶ identifies extreme weather, climate action failure, and biodiversity loss as the most severe global risks for the next decade, all of which could lead to the displacement of millions of people. Although war, conflict, and unemployment still remain the primary drivers of migration in many parts of the world, the World Bank report⁷, along with other scientific publications⁸ suggests that, with the increasing impact of global warming and climate change, these trends may soon shift substantially.

¹ D. J. Wrathall et al., *Water Stress and Human Migration: A Global, Georeferenced Review of Empirical Research* (Rome: Food And Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2018); M. Mileto, et al., *Migration and Its Interdependencies with Water Scarcity, Gender and Youth Employment* (Paris: WWAP, UNESCO, 2017); International Organization for Migration (IOM), *Institutional Strategy on Migration, Environment and Climate Change 2021–2030: For a comprehensive, evidence and rights-based approach to migration in the context of environmental degradation, climate change and disasters, for the benefit of migrants and societies* (Geneva: IOM, 2021); N. Nagabhatla et al., “Water and Migration: A Global Overview,” *UNU-INWEH Report Series*, No. 10 (Hamilton, Canada: United Nations University Institute for Water, Environment and Health, 2020); International Organization for Migration (IOM), *Institutional Strategy on Migration, Environment and Climate Change 2021–2030*; S. Mattar and E. Mbakwem, “Climate Migration,” in *Routledge Handbook of Climate Justice*, ed. T. Jafry (New York: Routledge, 2019).

² R. Bharadwaj et al., *Climate-induced Migration and Modern Slavery* (London: International Institute for Environment and Development, September 2021); Matthew Walsham, *Assessing the Evidence: Environment, Climate Change and Migration in Bangladesh* (Dhaka: IOM, 2010).

³ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), *Global Internal Displacement Database*, accessed August 07, 2023, <https://www.internal-displacement.org/database/displacement-data>.

⁴ E. Zaveri et al., *Ebb and Flow, Volume 1: Water, Migration, and Development* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2021).

⁵ Nagabhatla et al., “Water and Migration.”

⁶ World Economic Forum (WEF), *Global Risk Report 2023* (Cologny/Geneva: WEF, 2023).

⁷ Zaveri et al., *Ebb and Flow*.

⁸ J. Stoler et al., “Connecting the Dots between Climate Change, Household Water Insecurity, and Migration,” *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability* 51, (2021): 36–41.

Located in one of the disaster hot spots in South Asia, Bangladesh is a country that is extremely prone to human displacement and migration (often referred as a “ground case”)⁹ triggered by environmental factors along with the associated challenges due to its geographical position, exposure to natural hazards, high population density, resource scarcity, and low adaptive capacity. Cyclones, floods, and storm surges are frequent disasters that result in large-scale displacement within the country. For instance, in 2007, Cyclone Sidr forced over two million people to be relocated from the coastal region of Bangladesh, and two years later, Cyclone Aila in 2009 caused nearly the same number of people to be displaced.¹⁰ In addition to sudden-onset disasters, slow-onset disasters such as drought, salinity, and sea-level rise are also prevalent here. In 2019 alone, natural disasters displaced more than four million people within the country.¹¹ According to the World Bank, 13.3 million people might become environmental migrants in the next 30 years.¹² The latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report (AR6, 2021) predicts that if global warming continues at the present rate, roughly 17 per cent of Bangladesh’s population will need to be relocated within the next decade.¹³ These predictions paint a bleak picture of Bangladesh’s future, stressing the urgent need to prioritise the issues of environmental migration as well as safeguarding the well-being of millions of people who are now at risk of becoming environmental migrants.

1.1 *Problem Formulation*

There is no denying that Bangladesh is currently facing a significant number of human displacements due to environmental factors, with many individuals relocating either to their neighbouring places or to urban centres. Recent reports also highlight the growing instances of large-scale migration from the disaster hotspots. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC),¹⁴ nearly 1.5 million people were internally displaced in Bangladesh in 2022, with the majority being displaced

⁹ Md Shamsuddoha, *Climate-Induced Displacement and Migration: Policy Gaps and Policy Alternative* (Dhaka: Center for Participatory Research and Development (CPRD), November 2015).

¹⁰ “Why Should we Care About Environmental Migration?” *The Beam*, April 01, 2019.

¹¹ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), “Country Profile: Bangladesh,” accessed August 09, 2023, <https://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/bangladesh>.

¹² The World Bank, “Key Highlights: Country Climate and Development Report for Bangladesh,” October 31, 2022, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2022/10/31/key-highlights-country-climate-and-development-report-for-bangladesh>.

¹³ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), *Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis, Contribution of Working Group I to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

¹⁴ IDMC, “Country Profile: Bangladesh,” accessed July 24, 2023, <https://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/bangladesh>.

due to storms and floods. Besides, in the last ten years, 14.7 million people have been internally displaced due to 91 disasters and extreme weather events like floods, storms mainly cyclones, riverbank erosion, etc. This situation is set to degenerate further with the looming impacts of climate change. According to estimates from the Bangladesh government, around one in seven individuals in the country will be displaced due to climate change, with approximately 35 million people from coastal districts of Bangladesh being affected by this displacement.¹⁵

When these displaced people reach their place of destination, they face a whole gamut of challenges, including a lack of housing, food and water insecurity, resource scarcity and limited job opportunities. These factors make them more susceptible to poverty, social exclusion, and human rights violations.¹⁶ For instance, those who were displaced due to Cyclones Sidr and Aila, are still living in the informal slums in major cities of the country without basic needs and coverage of social safety nets. Many of them are also forced to work in poor working conditions in different informal sectors.¹⁷ The urban centres in Bangladesh are also not well prepared to provide the essential services needed for migrants to lead a normal and dignified life. Furthermore, according to the IOM, in addition to a spectrum of economic vulnerabilities, migrants are particularly exposed to sexual exploitation, gender-based violence, human trafficking, forced labour and modern slavery, and environmental migrants who are forced to flee quickly due to sudden-onset disaster events are at greater risk of those.¹⁸ Oftentimes, migrants are met with social resistance from the local community, which fuels tensions and conflicts in the places of destination. Psychological trauma and mental health are other issues which are often overlooked but are vital for the well-being of these vulnerable people. Research¹⁹ has shown that environmental challenges and the associated displacement can lead to significant mental health impacts, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety disorders as well.

¹⁵ Government of Bangladesh, *Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan: Decade 2030* (Dhaka: Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, September 2021); Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *বাস্তুচ্যুতি ব্যবস্থাপনা বিষয়ক জাতীয় কৌশলপত্র বাস্তবায়নে জাতীয় কর্মপরিকল্পনা ২০২২-২০৪২ (National Action Plan for the Implementation of the National Strategy Paper on Displacement Management 2022-2042)* (Dhaka: Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, August 2022).

¹⁶ M. Budrudzaman, "How do we prepare our cities for the inevitable wave of climate refugees?" *The Daily Star*, October 28, 2022.

¹⁷ H. Mehedi, A. K. Nag, and S. Farhana, *Climate Induced Displacement: Case Study of Cyclone Aila in the Southwest Coastal Region of Bangladesh* (Khulna: Clean, July 2010).

¹⁸ O. Brown, *Climate Change and Forced Migration: Observations, Projections and Implications*, Human Development Report Office (2007), accessed December 09, 2023, https://www.iisd.org/system/files/publications/climate_forced_migration.pdf.

¹⁹ J. M. Shultz, et al, "Public Health and Mental Health Implications of Environmentally Induced Forced Migration," *Disaster Medicine and Public Health Preparedness* 13, no. 2 (2018): 116-22.

Besides, the issue of environmental migration is not adequately addressed in the regulatory and policy framework of Bangladesh. The National Adaptation Action Plan (2009), National Disaster Management Act 2012, and Bangladesh Water Act 2013 do not directly mention environmental or climate migration, despite the fact that disasters, especially the hydro-meteorological ones, are expected to generate the largest number of environmental migrants, in the coming days. The issue is also absent from the Haor Master Plan 2012, National Disaster Management Regulation 2015, and National Disaster Management Plan 2021–2025. There is a lack of laws, regulations, or strategies under the Ministry of Social Welfare that specifically highlight the protection of internal migrants, particularly environmental migrants.

Nevertheless, there are policies in place that partially address the issue. Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (BCCSAP) 2009 has slightly touched upon climate-induced displacement, acknowledging it as an adaptation strategy. However, there is no clear policy guideline for these people in the document and their protection of social or human security. The Standing Orders on Disaster (SOD) gives guidance to various actors at national and sub-national levels on handling displacement. However, the focus is primarily on providing emergency shelter during a disaster. The pre-displacement and post-displacement phases are not addressed in the SOD. The Delta Plan 2100 mentions rural-urban migration but does not make any specific reference to environmental, climate, or ecological migration. The Perspective Plan of Bangladesh 2021–2041 discusses internal migration primarily from an economic perspective.

The newly adopted plans of the government—National Adaptation Plan of Bangladesh 2023–2050, 8th Five Year Plan 2020–2025, and the Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan 2022–2041—have made references to environmental and climate migrants but lack detailed policy guidelines, especially regarding their origin, vulnerabilities, and insecurities. Besides, there is limited discussion on the delegation of authority and responsibilities to address the issue. The only government document that exclusively addresses the issue of internal migration and displacement is অভ্যন্তরীণ বাস্তুচ্যুতি ব্যবস্থাপনা বিষয়ক জাতীয় কৌশলপত্র (National Strategy on Internal Displacement Management), which was published in 2021 by the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR), and focuses on the prevention, protection and permanent solutions to displacement. In light of the adopted national policy document, the government has prepared a national plan titled বাস্তুচ্যুতি ব্যবস্থাপনা বিষয়ক জাতীয় কৌশলপত্র বাস্তবায়নে জাতীয় কর্মপরিকল্পনা ২০২২–২০৪২ (National Action Plan for the Implementation of the National Strategy Paper on Displacement Management 2022–2042) to prevent displacement due to disasters and climate change, provide security and humanitarian

aid to the displaced, and ensure sustainable solutions for displaced people. However, most of the local government agencies at the field level and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) are unaware of this policy and plan²⁰ and its mainstreaming and implementation remains a significant challenge in Bangladesh.

In summary, it is now apparent that Bangladesh will continue to face the consequences of environment-related stress and the adverse impact of climate change, and environmental migration is going to become an increasingly pressing issue, posing serious challenges to both the displaced population and their places of destination. The lack of a regulatory framework and comprehensive policy protection tailored to address the needs and concerns of those vulnerable people will degenerate their situation even further. Therefore, it is now high time to prioritise the issue of environmental migration in the policy agenda and protect these vulnerable people.

1.2 *Aim, Research Questions, and Objectives*

The aim of the paper is to explore the human security concerns of environmental migration in Bangladesh and offer suggestions to improve their situation. The paper will attempt to answer the following research question, “What are the key human security concerns of environmental migrants in Bangladesh, and how can these issues be addressed?” The objectives of the paper are:

- to identify the key human security concerns of the environmental migrants; and
- to propose recommendations on how to address the identified human security concerns.

The paper is developed based on the argument that environmental migrants in Bangladesh are confronted with a number of human security concerns which need to be addressed with utmost importance in order to protect these vulnerable people.

1.3 *Methodology*

A qualitative research approach based on a case study research method was used in this study. The Satkhira district of Bangladesh was selected as a case

²⁰ Author’s own observations, derived from field visits to Satkhira, Khulna, and Bagerhat. This perspective aligns with the findings from KIIs also.

for analysis. This coastal district, located in the southwestern coastal region of the country within the Khulna division, is highly susceptible to hydro-meteorological disasters and has a high prevalence of environmental migration. It is surrounded by Jashore district to the north, Khulna district to the east, the Bay of Bengal to the south, and India to the west.

The majority of Satkhira's two million population is involved in agriculture, fishing, and shrimp farming. This area regularly experiences natural hazards such as salinity intrusion, coastal flooding, tidal surge, waterlogging, riverbank erosion and tropical cyclones. Besides, people living in the area face multifaceted socio-economic challenges such as a shortage of fresh water, limited income opportunities, inadequate access to basic services, lack of health facilities, low school attendance rates among children, and limited access to social protection, among others.²¹ The district also has high rates of illiteracy and poverty.

The coastal adjacent parts of Satkhira, particularly the Shyamnagar upazila, are comparatively more prone to disasters and experiencing fast declining livelihood opportunities than other parts. Recurrent disasters are now periodically destroying houses and crops, causing many people to fear for their lives and livelihoods and contributing to long-term physical, economic and emotional strain within the community, especially among the poor and vulnerable ones. As a result, there is an increasing trend of voluntary and forced migration from the region to nearby areas and beyond.²²

The selected case study for the research provided an in-depth understanding of environmental migration perspectives, along with the vulnerabilities and concerns of the affected population. This method facilitated the recognition of people's life experiences in the region, allowing their stories to be heard and their views to be acknowledged. This information provided the opportunity to prepare recommendations for better response planning and the development of well-informed policy outcomes to ensure the protection of environmental migrants.

²¹ LCBCE, *District Equity Profile—Satkhira*, Local Capacity Building and Community Empowerment (LCBCE) Programme, November 2014; International Organization for Migration, *District Snapshot—Satkhira* (Dhaka: IOM, 2020).

²² Päivi Lujala et al., "How do host-migrant proximities shape attitudes toward internal climate migrants?" *CMI Working Paper*, No. 2 (February 2020).

1.3.1 *Data Collection Method*

The research relied on both primary and secondary data. Along with employing the observational method, Focus Group Discussions (FGD), Key Informant Interviews (KII), and in-depth interviews with environmental migrants were conducted to collect primary data, utilising semi-structured open-ended questionnaires. The observational method helped to gain a practical first-hand understanding of the living experiences of people who have migrated and the conditions and factors that influenced or forced them to migrate. The interviews were conducted to elicit insights from the experts and individuals with substantial knowledge and experience in environmental migration. Data collected from the interviews were analysed using a deductive approach based on the analytical framework developed for the paper. The list of FGDs and interviews is detailed in Annex A. In addition to primary data, secondary data were sourced from academic books, journal articles, news reports, government documents, and other relevant sources to supplement the findings from the primary data and provide a broader context for the research. Online academic literature search engines such as ScienceDirect, Web of Science, ResearchGate, Google Scholar, etc., were used with multiple keywords to source relevant publications.

Establishing a participatory process was crucial for understanding the context, vulnerabilities, insecurities, and concerns of environmental migrations. Two field visits were conducted in the case study region, Satkhira; the first one took place in December 2022 and the second in July 2023. The field visits included Nalta union in Kaliganj upazila; Burigoalini, Gabura, Munshiganj, Padmapukur, and Shyamnagar unions in Shyamnagar upazila; Shibpur union in Satkhira Sadar upazila; and Satkhira municipality (visited study areas have been presented in Annex B). The selected locations were chosen primarily because they serve as both places of origin and destinations for environmental migration. Accessibility to the field area, as well as resource and time constraints, were also considered during the time of the selection process.

Conducting field visits to the places of origin was crucial for understanding the migration dynamics, context, pathways, and vulnerabilities of the migrants, whereas the place of destination was important to examine their human security concerns. While selecting the field visit destinations, it was taken into cognisance that people who are displaced often initially try to use pre-existing paths and relocate to nearby places within a short distance of their place of origin where they have support systems, networks, or family ties. If they are unable to settle there, they may then try

to move to urban centres and eventually to major city centres.²³ As illustrated by one of the migrants from Gabura union—

“I was displaced four times within Gabura before finding my way to Shibpur union. There are many people who have shifted more than four times within the union before ultimately leaving the place and migrating somewhere else.”²⁴

Four FGDs were conducted in four unions of Satkhira, one in each of Gabura, Munshiganj, Padmapukur, and Shibpur. Additionally, eight in-depth interviews were conducted with environmental migrants from these unions. In addition to that, ten KIIs were conducted with individuals from academia, government officials, NGO workers, and community volunteers. For the KIIs, purposive sampling was used, which allowed the author to select the participants who have specific knowledge, expertise, or experiences on environmental migration. In the case of in-depth interviews, the respondents were selected based on the availability and accessibility of the participants along with the convenience of the author. During the process, the social connections of the author with the local community and gatekeeper also played an important role. These interviews were important for gaining contextual understanding and in-depth insights into the research topic and the study area, triangulating the collected data, validating the findings, and substantiating the arguments.

1.4 *Limitations of the Study*

This study has several limitations. First, the aim of the research was to explore the human security perspective of environmental migrants in Bangladesh, focusing on migrants at their place of destination. Therefore, it was not within the scope to discuss the factors or causes leading to migration. Second, the study presented an in-depth analysis of human security concerns based on a single case study, using purposive and convenience sampling to conduct field visits, FGDs, and in-depth interviews. Due to the use of non-probability sampling methods, the generalisability of the findings was compromised. Third, conceptualising environmental migration was challenging due to the complex nature of migration, which depends on a range of factors. Environmental factors were not

²³ Abrar and Azad (2003), cited in T. Siddiqui et al., *Accommodating Migration in Climate Change Adaptation: A GBM Delta Bangladesh Perspective* (Dhaka: RMMRU, 2018); G. L. Clark and V. Mueller, “Natural Disasters and Population Mobility in Bangladesh,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 109, no. 16 (2012): 6000–6005; Brown, *Climate Change and Forced Migration*; E. Wilkinson et al., “Climate-induced Migration and Displacement: Closing the Policy Gap,” *ODI Briefing* (October 2016).

²⁴ Interview with an environmental migrant, Shibpur union, Satkhira, July 2023.

solely responsible for a person's migration decision, as it also depended on other socio-economic factors, the ability and the mindset of the migrants to migrate, the presence of social connections, etc. Nevertheless, apart from the environmental factors, other influencing factors were not considered in this paper while discussing environmental migration. Fourth, migrants are a diverse group, and their vulnerabilities and concerns vary based on gender, age, religion, social status, place of destination, adaptive capacity, etc. Since the paper could not collect segregated data based on this diverse categorisation, the study provided a general perspective of the human security concerns of migrants. Finally, migration can generate both positive and negative feelings among the migrants. Since the paper explored the human security concerns of environmental migrants, it is important to note that these concerns represent only one side of the story. Many respondents of the interviews and FGDs expressed their satisfaction with their new lives at their destination and stated that they are better off after migrating. This positive aspect of migration was not covered in the paper, as it falls outside the scope of the research.

1.5 *Structure of the Paper*

This paper is structured into six sections. Following the introduction, section two explores the available literature and highlights the research gap. Section three conceptualises environmental migration and human security before presenting the analytical framework. Section four examines the human security concerns of environmental migrants in Bangladesh, while section five outlines the recommendations to address these concerns. Finally, section six concludes the paper.

2. Literature Review and Research Gap

This study explores the available literature on environmental migration from two perspectives: environmental migration from a global perspective and Bangladesh's perspective. A significant body of literature and reports²⁵ are available on the concept

²⁵ R. C. Ghosh and C. Orchiston, "A Systematic Review of Climate Migration Research: Gaps in Existing Literature," *SN Social Sciences* 2, no. 5 (2022); M. Beine, and L. Jeusette, "A Meta-analysis of the Literature on Climate Change and Migration," *IZA Discussion Paper* 12639 (2019); N. Nagabhatla et al., *Water and Migration: A Global Overview*; N. Nagabhatla, et al, "Water and Food Security Crisis Influencing Human Mobility Patterns: A Comprehensive Overview," in *Food Security and Land Use Change under Conditions of Climatic Variability*, eds. V. Squires and M. Gaur (Cham: Springer, 2020); UNESCO and UN-Water, *The United Nations World Water Development Report 2020 - Water and Climate Change* (Paris: UNESCO, 2020); B. Mallick, Z. Sultana and C. M. Bennett, "How do sustainable livelihoods influence environmental (Non) migration aspirations?" *Applied Geography* 124 (2020); M. Brzoska, and C. Fröhlich, "Climate change, migration and violent conflict: vulnerabilities, pathways and adaptation strategies," *Migration and Development* 5, no. 2 (2015): 190–210; A. Oliver-Smith, "Debating Environmental Migration: Society, Nature and Population Displacement in Climate Change," *Journal of International Development* 24, no. 8 (2012): 1058–70.

of “environmental migration,” “climate migration,” “environmental/climate refugee” and “environmental/climate displacement” in the global context. Research reports and academic publications have already recognised environment and climate-related stressors as significant factors for migration. Nevertheless, migration decisions or displacement due to environmental causes is not straightforward and depends on other socio-economic factors, and this has been illustrated in different publications.²⁶ In this regard, Black et al. argued that the environment can reinforce the effect on other basic drivers of migration namely, political, demographic, economic, and social, and at the same time can independently influence migration as well.²⁷ Foresight’s report on migration and global environmental change made a similar argument and underscored the importance of investigating environmental drivers and their interaction with other drivers of migration.²⁸ Stoler and his colleagues’ research in Kenya demonstrated the convergence of various factors such as environmental change, ineffective governance, insufficient adaptability, poverty, and personal aspirations for migration in Kenya.²⁹ So, it can be said that environmental and climatic stress factors to migration are now well documented in the literature. Nevertheless, it needs to be acknowledged that migration decisions are shaped not solely by any specific issue but by a myriad of socio-economic considerations as well.

Recent bodies of literature have emphasised on the impacts of climate change on inciting or triggering internal and/or international migration, either directly or through spillover effects of various environmental stressors, such as water scarcity, variation in precipitation, crop production failure, and the loss of livelihoods due to natural resource scarcity.³⁰ Based on 184 peer-reviewed research articles, a research report published by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)³¹ argued that there is a strong consensus that resource stress impacts people’s decision to migrate. Besides, the report also highlighted other research findings that demonstrated the correlation between higher temperatures and extreme rainfall with increased migration rates. In

²⁶ L. Färber, N. Nagabhatla, and I. Ruysen, “Assessment of Water-Migration-Gender Interconnections in Ethiopia,” *Frontiers in Human Dynamics* 4 (2022); C. Falco, F. Donzelli, and A. Olper, “Climate Change, Agriculture and Migration: A Survey,” *Sustainability* 10 (2018): 1–21; M. A. Call et al., “Disruption, not Displacement: Environmental Variability and Temporary Migration in Bangladesh,” *Global Environmental Change* 46 (2017): 157–165; V. O. Kolmannskog, “Climate Change, Disaster Displacement and International Law,” *Journal of International Development* 24 (2012).

²⁷ R. Black et al., “The Effect of Environmental Change on Human Migration,” *Global Environmental Change* 21, no 1 (2011): 3–11.

²⁸ Foresight, *Migration and Global Environmental Change: Future Challenges and Opportunities* (London: The Government Office for Science, 2011).

²⁹ Stoler et al., “Connecting the Dots between Climate Change.”

³⁰ Beine and Jeusette, “A Meta-analysis of the Literature.”

³¹ Wrathall et al., *Water Stress and Human Migration*.

the recent publication of *Ten New Insights in Climate Science*, Martin et al.³² pointed out the impact of climate change on human mobility, but acknowledged the limited understanding of the contextual, compounding, and cascading linkage of climate and mobility. They stressed the importance of an anticipatory approach, rather than a reactive ex-post response, to reduce or prevent involuntary mobility among climate-vulnerable communities. This linkage was also highlighted by Warner and Afifi,³³ who conducted their research based on data collected from eight countries, including Bangladesh.

Focusing on the insecurities and vulnerabilities of environmental migrants, Gemenne et al.³⁴ argued that environmental migration is inherently insecure and that policy responses to the environment and climate-induced displacement must prioritise the protection of the human rights of affected populations. The research conducted by Mattar and Mbakwem³⁵ brought attention to the vulnerabilities faced by the displaced due to climate-related factors. Their work highlighted the pitfalls of existing material and risk-centred approaches to migration and underscored the importance of adopting a human-centric strategy that emphasises the well-being and rights of these individuals. Underlining the damaging outcomes of climate change, Shultz et al.³⁶ argued that environmental migration invariably results in significant resource and social losses, often subjecting migrants to traumatic experiences and violence. They emphasised the importance of addressing the impact of displacement on mental well-being and psychological functioning as a key facet of forced migration.

Water has long been a significant factor influencing human mobility. In the current climate change context, there have been a number of publications explaining the role of water in environmental migration. According to a World Bank report titled “Ebb and Flow”³⁷ which was based on an extensive global analysis of 189 census data sets comprising half a billion people from 64 countries, water scarcity was linked to a ten per cent rise in total migration within countries between 1970 and 2000. Justin Stoler and his colleagues³⁸ presented an overview of the periodic and

³² M. A. Martin et al., “Ten New Insights in Climate Science 2022,” *Global Sustainability* 5 (2022).

³³ K. Warner and T. Afifi, “Where the Rain Falls: Evidence from 8 Countries on How Vulnerable Households Use Migration to Manage the Risk of Rainfall Variability and Food Insecurity,” *Climate and Development* 6, no. 1 (2014): 1–17.

³⁴ Gemenne et al., *Forced Displacement Related to the Impacts of Climate Change and Disasters*, Reference Paper for the 70th Anniversary of the 1951 Refugee Convention, June 2021, accessed November 27, 2023, https://www.unhcr.org/people-forced-to-flee-book/wp-content/uploads/sites/137/2021/10/Franc%CC%A7ois-Gemenne-et-al_Forced-displacement-related-to-the-impacts-of-climate-change-and-disasters.pdf.

³⁵ Mattar and Mbakwem, “Climate Migration.”

³⁶ Shultz et al., “Public Health and Mental Health.”

³⁷ Zaveri et al., *Ebb and Flow*.

³⁸ J. Stoler et al., “The Role of Water in Environmental Migration,” *WIREs Water* 9, no. 3 (2022).

chronic water-related factors that lead to environmental migration at the household level. Jagerskog and his colleagues³⁹ acknowledged the relationship between water, climate change, and migration, but argued that establishing overly simplistic causal relationships can be problematic and lead to counterproductive policy outcomes. Citing the findings of the World Water Development Report, Miletto et al.⁴⁰ observed a clear link between water scarcity, food insecurity, social instability and unrest that they believe might instigate migration globally. Nagabhatla et al.⁴¹ highlighted the interrelationship between water, climate, and migration and argued that this linkage is under-investigated. They noted that water crises can lead to conflict and serve as a catalyst for both voluntary and involuntary migration, depending on the circumstances.

There is a significant body of literature available on environmental and climate migration in Bangladesh, with Ghosh and Orchiston⁴² identifying 21 relevant publications through a systematic review. However, the spread and diversity of the available work make it difficult to identify any specific trends. The available research indicates that environmental and climatic factors will increasingly impact people's migration choices, whether voluntary or forced. Although several reports and government documents⁴³ are available where projections related to the number of environmental migrants in Bangladesh have been made along with their future trends, only a limited number of academic literature⁴⁴ that focuses on the security aspects of environmental/climate migration in the country can be found.

Several publications have highlighted the vulnerabilities of environmental migrants in Bangladesh. Focusing on peoples' socio-economic consequences, Islam and Shamsuddoha⁴⁵ argued that permanent migration due to displacement had long-term

³⁹ A. Jägerskog et al., "Water, Migration and How they are Interlinked," *Working Paper 27* (Stockholm: Stockholm International Water Institute, 2016).

⁴⁰ M. Miletto et al., *Migration and its interdependencies with water scarcity, gender and youth employment* (Paris: WWAP, UNESCO, 2017).

⁴¹ Nagabhatla et al., "Water and Migration."

⁴² Ghosh and Orchiston, "A Systematic Review of Climate Migration."

⁴³ Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, Government of Bangladesh, অভ্যন্তরীণ বাস্তুচ্যুতি ব্যবস্থাপনা বিষয়ক জাতীয় কৌশলপত্র (*National Strategy on Internal Displacement Management*) (Dhaka: Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, Government of Bangladesh, January 2021); Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, বাস্তুচ্যুতি ব্যবস্থাপনা বিষয়ক জাতীয় কৌশলপত্র বাস্তবায়নে জাতীয় কর্মপরিকল্পনা ২০২২-২০৪২ (*National Action Plan for the Implementation of the National Strategy Paper on Displacement Management 2022–2042*); IPCC, *Climate Change 2021*.

⁴⁴ Work of Ben Saul focuses on security risk of displacement induced by the climate change. For details, see B. Saul, "The Security Risks of Climate Change Displacement in Bangladesh," *Sydney Law School Research Paper No. 12/58* (August 29, 2012).

⁴⁵ M. R. Islam and M. Shamsuddoha, "Socioeconomic Consequences of Climate-induced Human Displacement and Migration in Bangladesh," *International Sociology* 32, no. 3 (2017): 277–298.

adverse impacts on livelihoods, especially for the vulnerable segment of society, including people with disabilities, the elderly, and women. Bharadwaj et al.⁴⁶, based on case studies in Bangladesh and Ghana, claimed that climate change and climate-induced migration heightened existing vulnerabilities to slavery and slavery-like practices, including debt bondage, forced sexual exploitation, forced labour, etc. Moynul Ahsan⁴⁷ highlighted the limitations of local governments in addressing challenges related to environmental migration in Bangladesh and put forward a set of recommendations to improve the situation. Fatema-Tuj-Juhra,⁴⁸ in her work, explored the effectiveness of national plans and policies in addressing the issues of climate-induced internally displaced persons and argued for a more comprehensive policy framework.

The gender perspective of environmental migration is also present in Bangladeshi literature. Eversten et al.⁴⁹ discussed gender norms in the context of migration and how they had been used as an adaptive strategy to environmental stressors. Anwara Begum⁵⁰ focused on migration and resettlement in Bangladesh from a gender and climate change perspective but mainly discussed the vulnerability of people to natural disasters and climate change, not environmental migrants. Sonja Ayeb-Karlsson⁵¹ highlighted the gender perspective during disasters and argued that not everyone has the same opportunity to move during such times.

A good number of studies have been conducted on the factors determining people's migration decisions in Bangladesh. Tignino and Mach⁵² pointed out how water-related issues, such as water scarcity and insecurity, influence migration decisions. They stressed the importance of incorporating internal migration into water plans and policies, as well as into the water governance framework. Akter

⁴⁶ Bharadwaj et al., *Climate-induced Migration and Modern Slavery*.

⁴⁷ Md. M. Ahsan, "Role and Policy Challenges of Local Governments on Environmentally Induced Displacement and Migration in Bangladesh," *ResearchGate*, December 2017, accessed December 10, 2023, <http://tinyurl.com/rbu63c6e>.

⁴⁸ Fatema-Tuj-Juhra, "Climate-Induced Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Bangladesh: Analysis of Policy Implementation," *BISS Journal* 42, no. 3 (July 2021): 291-310.

⁴⁹ K. F. Evertsen and K. van der Geest, "Gender, Environment and Migration in Bangladesh," *Climate and Development* 12, no. 1 (2019): 12–22.

⁵⁰ A. Begum, *Review of Migration and Resettlement in Bangladesh: Effects of Climate Change and Its Impact on Gender Roles*, DECCMA Working Paper, Deltas, Vulnerability and Climate Change: Migration and Adaptation, IDRC Project Number 107642 (2017), accessed November 25, 2023, https://generic.wordpress.soton.ac.uk/deccma/wp-content/uploads/sites/181/2017/07/Review-of-migration-and-resettlement-in-Bangladesh-effects-of-climate-change-and-its-impact-on-gender-roles_Begum-A_working_paper-WP3.pdf.

⁵¹ Sonja Ayeb-Karlsson, "When the Disaster Strikes: Gendered (im)mobility in Bangladesh," *Climate Risk Management* 29 (2020).

⁵² M. Tignino and E. Mach, "Migration and Water Governance," *Migration, Environment and Climate Change: Policy Brief Series* 4, no. 2 (May 2018).

et al.⁵³ conducted a study on Shyamnagar upazila in the Satkhira district. Based on their findings, the researchers argued that unemployment, fear of recurrent natural disasters, food insecurity along with poverty were the main reasons for environmental migration from Bangladesh's southwest coastal area. The study conducted by Islam and Hasan⁵⁴ found that people displaced by Aila were forced to migrate to nearby areas due to financial hardship, loss of property, and a lack of safety. They faced significant challenges, including unemployment, homelessness, health problems, and limited access to essential services.

Some studies are available on the human rights perspectives of environmental migration in Bangladesh. Based on a case study of an urban city in Bangladesh, Adger et al.⁵⁵ demonstrated how environmental hazards increase basic human insecurities among the migrant population over time, as manifested in their physical and mental health status. They argued that, in the context of climate change, environmental hazards will continue to be a significant source of insecurity for migrants. Naser et al.⁵⁶ examined climate migration from a human rights standpoint and proposed a range of policy responses, including those supporting internal migration, in order to manage displacement caused by climate change efficiently and sustainably. Rana and Ilina⁵⁷ studied the impacts of climate-induced migration on Bangladeshi cities and argued that the country needs a comprehensive and transformative territorial/spatial planning strategy to address the challenges posed by this migration.

To sum up the literature review, it can be said that scholarship on environmental migration is dominated by the causes of migration, the relationship between environmental factors and migration decisions, and the impact of such migration in the place of destination. The publications have also highlighted growing concerns about climate change and its possible impacts on the future of migration. The available literature has stressed the importance of giving close attention to this issue and higher priority in institutional and policy formulation. While the existing

⁵³ M. N. Akhter, Tapos Kumar Chakraborty, Gopal Chandra Ghosh, Prianka Ghosh, Sayka Jahan, "Migration Due to Climate Change from the South-West Coastal Region of Bangladesh: A Case Study on Shymnagar Upazilla, Satkhira District," *American Journal of Environmental Protection* 5, no. 6 (December 2016): 145–151.

⁵⁴ M. R. Islam and M. Hasan, "Climate-induced Human Displacement: A Case study of Cyclone Aila in the Southwest Coastal Region of Bangladesh," *Natural Hazards* 81, no. 2, (2016): 1051–1071.

⁵⁵ W. N. Adger et al., "Human Security of Urban Migrant Populations Affected by Length of Residence and Environmental Hazards," *Journal of Peace Research* 58, no. 1 (2021): 50–66.

⁵⁶ M. M. Naser, "Climate Change, Migration and Human Rights in Bangladesh: Perspectives on Governance," *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 60, no. 2 (2019): 175–190.

⁵⁷ M. Rana and I. Ilina, "Climate Change and Migration Impacts on Cities: Lessons from Bangladesh," *Environmental Challenges* 5 (2021); Mattar and Mbakwem, "Climate Migration."

scholarship on environmental migration is thorough, covering aspects ranging from the situation, process, causes, and impacts to policy implications of migration, it appears that there are gaps in certain areas. Notably, only a few publications explore the vulnerabilities and insecurities of migrants in their destination, particularly from a human security perspective. Although some of the components like economic security, food security, water security, vulnerability to exploitation as well as gender aspects of migration have been highlighted in some of the publications, the scholarship is scattered without a comprehensive rooting of the concept of human security. This study will attempt to fill the research gap by exploring the human security concerns of environmental migrants in Bangladesh by using a comprehensive human security framework.

3. Conceptual Clarity and Analytical Framework

The issue of environmental migration is complex, and there is no single, universally accepted definition of the term. It is difficult to attribute migration solely to environmental reasons since the whole process is influenced by a combination of different factors of migration. This makes it challenging to distinguish the precise role of the environment in migration from other drivers.⁵⁸ As one of the respondents from academia explains—

“Migration takes place in a combination of different influencing factors and social networks. Environment is one of the influencing factors.”⁵⁹

Another challenge in conceptualising the issue is that people who migrate or are displaced due to environmental reasons, natural disasters, or changing climatic conditions are often referred to by various terms such as “climate migrants,” “environmental/climate refugees,” “ecological migrants/ecomigrants,” “environment/climate-induced displaced people,” and “climate evacuee,” among others.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, certain terms have limitations on their usage, and some scholars have drawn a distinction between the interchangeable use of certain terms.

⁵⁸ Siddiqui et al., *Accommodating Migration*; Mostafa Mahmud Naser, Mohammad Shahidul Swapan, Reazul Ahsan, Tanzim Afroz and Sabrina Ahmed, “Climate Change, Migration and Human Rights in Bangladesh: Perspectives on Governance,” *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 60, no. 2 (2019): 175–90.

⁵⁹ Interview with academia, Dhaka, June 2023.

⁶⁰ J. S. Kupferberg, “Migration and Dignity—Relocation and Adaptation in the Face of Climate Change Displacement in the Pacific—a Human Rights Perspective,” *The International Journal of Human Rights* 25, no. 10 (2021): 1793–1818; Brown, *Climate Change and Forced Migration*.

The 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol⁶¹ limit the scope of the term “refugee.” For that, people affected by internal migration, economic and social persecution, and environmental/climate impacts do not fall within this category.⁶² Though, at times, the terms “migration” and “displacement” are used interchangeably, some have pointed out some distinctions between the two, in which migration is often understood as the voluntary act of leaving one’s residence to settle somewhere else, while displacement typically entails forceful movement from one’s habitual place of residence.⁶³ Nevertheless, the paper has not made any distinction between the terms migration and displacement and opted to use them interchangeably.

Now, to overcome the conceptualisation challenges, the paper adopts a general perspective by taking a broad definition of environmental migration provided by IOM that defines “environmental migrants” as “persons or groups of persons who, for reasons of sudden or progressive changes in the environment that adversely affect their lives or living conditions, are obliged to have to leave their habitual homes or choose to do so, either temporarily or permanently, and who move either within their territory or abroad.”⁶⁴ These people could involve: (a) individuals who experience temporary displacement due to temporary environmental stress, (b) those who face permanent displacement due to permanent environmental change, and (c) those who undergo temporary or permanent displacement due to the progressive degradation of the resource base.⁶⁵ The definition captures movements occurring due to both slow-onset and sudden-onset disasters along with resource scarcity.

It is important to recognise that different types of migration respond differently to environmental change. A study conducted by Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU) and Sussex Centre for Migration Research

⁶¹ UNHCR, *Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees*, The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, accessed August 11, 2023, <https://www.unhcr.org/media/convention-and-protocol-relating-status-refugees>.

⁶² UNHCR, *Convention and Protocol*; Frank Biermann and Ingrid Boas, “Climate Change and Human Migration: Towards a Global Governance System to Protect Climate Refugees,” in *Climate Change, Human Security and Violent Conflict*, eds. Jürgen Scheffran et al. (Berlin: Springer, 2012); Shamsuddoha, *Climate-Induced Displacement and Migration*; Brown, *Climate Change and Forced Migration*.

⁶³ Mattar and Mbakwem, “Climate Migration”; IOM, “Key Migration Terms,” accessed June 20, 2023, <https://www.iom.int/key-migration-terms>; Emily Wilkinson et al., “Climate-induced Migration and Displacement: Closing the Policy Gap,” *ODI Briefing* (October 2016).

⁶⁴ IOM, UNHCR and UNU-EHS, *Climate Change, Migration, and Displacement: Impacts, Vulnerability, and Adaptation Options, Submission by the IOM, the UNHCR and the UNU, in Cooperation with the NRC and the RSG on the HR OF IDPS*, 5th Session of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Long-Term Cooperative Action under the Convention (AWG-LCA 5) (Bonn, March 29–April 08, 2009).

⁶⁵ J. Jacobson, cited in Rana and Ilina, “Climate Change and Migration Impacts.”

(SCMR) found that internal livelihood migration is highly sensitive to such changes, in contrast to international short-term contract migration and long-term permanent migration.⁶⁶ Besides, environmental migration mostly occurs internally, and three out of every four migrants stay within their own country's borders,⁶⁷ highlighting the prominent role of internal migration within the broader context of environmental migration discourse. Thus, the paper will limit its scope of "environmental migration" to refer to the internal movement of the population due to environmental factors.

To discuss the concerns of environmental migrants when they reach their destination, the study adopts a human security perspective, focusing on the broader aspect of security, keeping migrants as the referent object and prioritising their security and survival. The human security approach to the security paradigm pushes the discussion of security beyond the level of the nation-state by placing individuals at the receiving end of security concerns, where security is understood as freedom from "fear," "want," and "indignity" (Figure 1).⁶⁸ The Human Development Report of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) first introduced the concept of freedom from "want" and "fear" in 1994.⁶⁹ Thereafter, in the report titled "Human Security Now,"⁷⁰ the scope of human security was broadened by incorporating the concept of "freedom to live in dignity." By prioritising people as the focal point of analysis and action, the human security approach stresses the protection of the rights of both individuals and communities and comprehensively deals with the wide range of insecurities, namely economic, food, water, health, environmental, personal, community, and political among others.⁷¹

⁶⁶ Siddiqui et al., *Accommodating Migration*.

⁶⁷ Zaveri et al., *Ebb and Flow*.

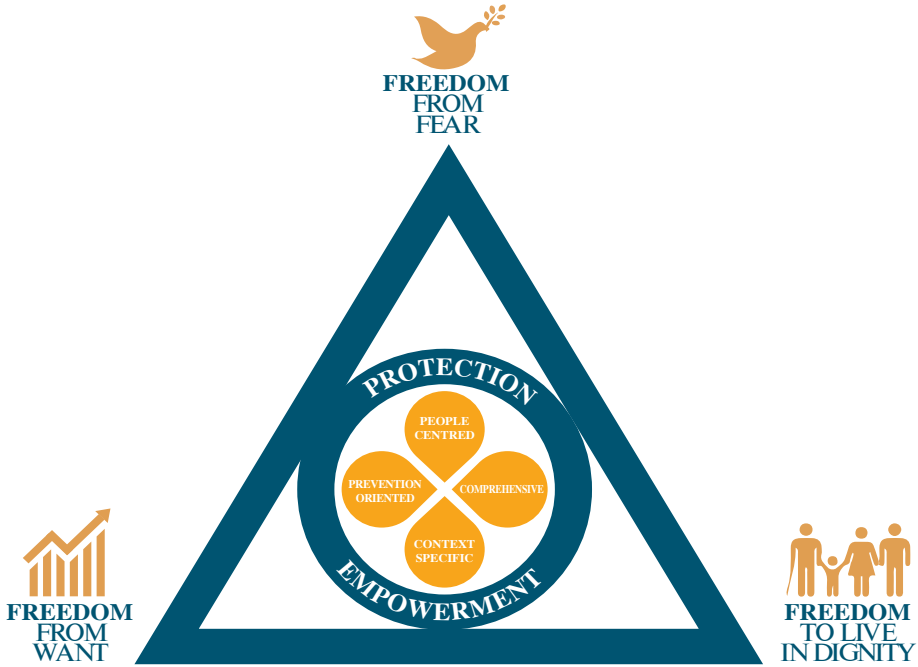
⁶⁸ United Nations, *Human Security in Theory and Practice* (Human Security Unit, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, United Nations, 2009); Rita Floyd, "Human Security and the Copenhagen School's Securitization Approach: Conceptualizing Human Security as a Securitizing Move," *Human Security* 5, no. 37 (2007); Des Gasper, "The Idea of Human Security," in *Climate Change, Ethics and Human Security*, ed. Karen O' Brian (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

⁶⁹ UNDP, *Human Development Report 1994* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

⁷⁰ Commission on Human Security, *Human Security Now: Protecting and Empowering People* (New York: Commission on Human Security, 2003).

⁷¹ United Nations, *Human Security Handbook: An Integrated Approach for the Realization of the Sustainable Development Goals and the Priority Areas of the International Community and the United Nations System* (New York: United Nations Human Security Unit, January 2016).

Figure 1: Fundamentals of Human Security⁷²



As mentioned above, the discussion of human security mainly hovers around three fundamental pillars: freedom from want, freedom from fear, and freedom from indignity. Freedom from want means having access to basic necessities such as food, water, shelter, healthcare, and education, as well as being free from poverty and hunger. Freedom from fear means being free from violence, war, and crime, as well as oppression and abuse. Freedom from indignity means being treated with respect and dignity and having the right to self-determination. However, the list is not exhaustive and different agencies have incorporated and prioritised certain rights based on their own principles and priorities.

In Bangladesh, the government has developed a National Strategy paper on Internal Displacement Management that underscores the importance of protecting several rights of the displaced persons like the right to life, equity and equal opportunity, security, development, housing, employment, participation, and

⁷² United Nations, *Human Security Handbook*.

information.⁷³ The Center for Participatory Research and Development (CPRD) has emphasised six basic human rights—access to water, adequate food, shelter, quality of life, freedom, and self-determination—which it believes could be compromised due to displacement.⁷⁴ Additionally, there also exist international instruments like the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement of the United Nations (UN),⁷⁵ Global Compact for Migration (GCM),⁷⁶ and Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) report on the relationship between climate change and human rights⁷⁷ which details the basic rights of migrants. The UN Guiding Principles emphasise the right to sanitation, essential medical services, appropriate clothing, basic shelter and housing, safe access to essential food and potable water, an adequate standard of living as well as the right to protection and humanitarian assistance for the internal migrants. On the other hand, the OHCHR report highlights how basic human rights such as the right to life, housing, health, water, adequate food and self-determination could be hindered by climate change.

To summarise the above discussion and give it a proper analytical structure, a conceptual framework for human security has been adopted and employed in this paper (Figure 2). The strength of the human security framework lies in its fundamental focus on the protection and empowerment of vulnerable individuals by recognising their basic rights as described in national and international policies and guidelines.

⁷³ Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, “অভ্যন্তরীণ বাস্তুচ্যুতি ব্যবস্থাপনা বিষয়ক জাতীয় কৌশলপত্র (*National Strategy paper on Internal Displacement Management*).”

⁷⁴ Shamsuddoha, *Climate-Induced Displacement and Migration*.

⁷⁵ United Nations, *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*, June 2001, accessed December 10, 2023, <https://www.unhcr.org/fr-fr/en/media/guiding-principles-internal-displacement>.

⁷⁶ United Nations, *Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration* (January 2019), accessed December 14, 2023, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N18/451/99/PDF/N1845199.pdf?OpenElement>.

⁷⁷ UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the Relationship between Climate Change and Human Rights*, UN Doc. A/HRC/10/61 (January 15, 2009).

Figure 2: Human Security Framework⁷⁸

Human Security Framework		
Freedom from Want	Freedom from Fear	Freedom from Indignity
<p>Food security: access to safe, nutritious, and affordable food</p> <p>Health security: access to quality healthcare</p> <p>Economic security: the opportunity to earn a living wage and build a secure financial future</p> <p>Environmental security: access to a healthy environment</p> <p>Water security: access to clean and safe water</p> <p>Rights to adequate housing: access to safe and affordable housing.</p>	<p>Personal security from violence, abuse, oppression, crime</p> <p>Community security from ethnic and religious tension</p> <p>Political security from repression and torture</p>	<p>Right to dignity: right to be treated with respect and dignity</p> <p>Basic human rights: access to human rights and protection from human rights violations</p> <p>Security from prejudice and discrimination: ensuring that everyone is free from prejudice and discrimination</p> <p>Right to self-determination: ensuring that everyone has the right to determine their own destiny</p>

4. Human Security Concerns of Environmental Migrants

Although Bangladesh is working hard to adapt to the changing climate as well as increasing events of natural disasters, it is now evident that environmental migration will become more prevalent as these conditions deteriorate and disasters become more existential. There is a growing concern that many of the adaptation strategies will reach their limit in the future, as global efforts are nowhere near keeping global warming below 1.5°C, thus instigating displacement and migration.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Adapted by the author.

⁷⁹ According to Ten New Insights in Climate Science, adaptation is projected to become less and less effective at higher global warming level which will instigate rapid migration in the future. For details, please see, Martin et al., “Ten New Insights in Climate Science.”

After facing any disaster or environmental degradation, people tend to migrate to nearby places, especially those who lack economic and social capital and have very limited networks. During their journey and after reaching their destination, these people have to compromise many of their basic human rights and face a whole gamut of challenges ranging from lack of access to adequate and nutritious food, pure drinking water, housing, health, and education facilities to abuse and exploitation. Besides, in many cases, they face humiliation and mental abuse, and their right to dignity, and other intangible values are often undermined.

The socio-economic effects of displacement and migration caused by environmental and climate factors are complex and interconnected with many other issues. These effects can vary depending on factors such as gender, age, race, religion, and physical strength. Women, children, elderly and disabled persons are often more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and environmental disruptions and may be disproportionately affected by migration. Besides, there also exist differences in vulnerabilities among those who migrated to nearby rural areas in contrast to those who migrated to urban centres. The situation may also vary for short-term displaced persons following sudden-onset events compared to permanent migrants. This study adopts a broader general view of environmental migrants' human security perspective by incorporating this diverse range of migrant groups and exploring their concerns from three basic pillars of human security—freedom from fear, want, and indignity—as conceptualised in section three.

4.1 *Freedom from Want*

4.1.1 *Economic Security*

Economic hardship is one of the most common insecurities among environmental migrants. When individuals or communities are forced to leave their homes due to environmental factors, they often face significant economic challenges in their new surroundings. Displacement disrupts livelihoods, leading to loss of income, property, and access to resources. These migrated people usually have lower educational levels and skills, thus struggle to find employment in new unfamiliar territories, face discrimination, and encounter economic disparities that exacerbate their vulnerabilities.

Another major challenge that environmental migrants face is the start-up cost. They often do not have enough capital to start new businesses, nor do they have the opportunity to acquire new skills that will allow them to earn a good living. In many cases, they receive little or no help from government agencies or NGOs, and

they are often excluded from the social safety net programmes of the government. In response to a question related to economic insecurity, one participant of the FGD stated, “When we first migrated to this place, we did not have any money. We had to borrow money from other people to buy food and support our family. It was a really tough time for us back then.”⁸⁰

Another hardship that the respondents stressed was their inability to save money, especially for their future or any unforeseen event. This is because most of them depend on very limited earnings, which severely curtails their opportunities to save. In case of an emergency, they need to borrow money from other people to survive. One of the respondents said—

“I earn 250 taka a day for working in others’ fields and have to spend 200 taka for my family. So, at the end of the week, I save only 300 to 350 taka. If one of my children gets sick, I have to spend at least 100 taka for transportation to take him to the doctor. Sometimes, I also have to buy medicines. So, in the end, I do not have any money to save. Rather, I owe money to others at the end of the year.”⁸¹

4.1.2 *Food Security*

Food insecurity is another pressing concern among environmental migrants. Displacement caused by environmental factors disrupts not only economic and livelihood opportunities but also access to essential daily needs, including food. Migrants often face challenges in meeting their dietary needs in new and unfamiliar environments. The loss of agricultural land disrupted food supply chains, and limited economic opportunities restricted their access to adequate and nutritious food. Shortage of cooking materials is another major concern for them.

Among the migrants, vulnerable groups such as women, children, and the elderly bear the major brunt of food insecurity, which has a devastating impact on their health and well-being. Food insecurity leads to malnutrition, stunting, child-birth-related complexities and other health problems as well.

4.1.3 *Water Security*

In addition to food, the lack of pure drinking water is another pressing issue for environmental migrants, which significantly impacts their health and welfare.

⁸⁰ FGD, Shibpur union, Satkhira, July 2023.

⁸¹ Interview with an environmental migrant, Shibpur union, Satkhira, July 2023.

The living condition of environmental migrants is aggravated due to lack of access to clean water, contaminated water consumption, poor sanitation and hygiene. As one of the FGDs revealed—

“Here, more than 40 families depend on only one tube well. The water table is low here, which requires high pressure to lift the water. Besides, water in the area also has arsenic and salinity.”⁸²

What is more, the lack of access to drinking water in salinity-affected regions disproportionately affects women and children who have migrated. The amount of water used by a household is directly related to their health and is affected by a number of factors, such as the distance to the source, the time it takes to collect water, the type of source, its reliability, and its cost. Within this setting, female members of a migrant family are required to cover considerable distances on foot to collect drinking water for domestic and other purposes. Health issues emerge when a household utilises less than five litres of water per individual each day or when the process of collecting water from a source that is situated more than one kilometre (km) away takes more than 30 minutes.⁸³ Additionally, migrants often face water logging at their residences due to inadequate drainage systems, severely hurting their health conditions.

4.1.4 *Health Security*

The FGDs and in-depth interviews reveal that the health of environmental migrants usually worsens after they arrive at their destination. The migrated people have increased exposure to communicable and water-and-vector-borne diseases. As one participant stated—

“Water-borne diseases like diarrhoea, cholera, food poisoning, skin problems, and stomach pain are common here. We often suffer from these diseases.”⁸⁴

The health of environmental migrants is further compromised by the lack of access to adequate sanitation and hygiene facilities, leading to the spread of water-borne diseases. Poor sanitation also contributes to the spread of respiratory infections, such as pneumonia.

⁸² FGD, Shibpur union, Satkhira, July 2023.

⁸³ Stoler et al., “Connecting the Dots between Climate Change.”

⁸⁴ FGD, Gabura union, Satkhira, July 2023.

What is even more worrying is that environmental degradation and climate change are expected to increase the already worsening health risks of migrants. This is because the places where they relocate often have limited or no public health infrastructure. For example, a participant from an FGD said—

“We have to go to Satkhira Sadar for treatment. It can take nearly an hour on an easy bike, depending on the condition of the road. In case of an emergency, it is very difficult to call an ambulance because the road condition is really bad. Sometimes, the ambulance charges 1500 to 2000 taka due to the bad road conditions, which we cannot afford.”⁸⁵

What is more, ensuring health facilities for vulnerable migrant groups, such as women, children, elderly, and disabled persons, is another major concern at the destination. This is particularly true when the destination is located in a remote area, where travelling to health facilities can take significant time. In many cases, these groups of people are considered burdensome. As one respondent from academia highlighted—

“In rural contexts, sick and elderly migrants have sometimes been considered a burden because it takes two to three hours to take them to hospitals. Pregnant women also face significant challenges, especially during delivery or if any complications arise.”⁸⁶

4.1.5 *Environmental Security*

When migrated, especially due to sudden-onset disasters, people are often forced to live in informal settlements. These places are often overcrowded with high environmental risks and lack basic amenities such as water, sanitation, and electricity. The lack of access to clean water, sanitation, or healthcare makes them more vulnerable to the adverse impact of environmental hazards. These are also vulnerable to flooding, water logging and other natural disasters. As a result, the people who live here are exposed to health-related hazards and forced to live in dilapidated conditions. As one of the migrants from the interview said—

“High tides are a common problem for us, as they sometimes inundate our rooms and furniture. Besides, when there is heavy rain or depression in the sea, our houses completely go underwater.”⁸⁷

⁸⁵ FGD, Shibpur union, Satkhira, July 2023.

⁸⁶ Interview with academia, Dhaka, June 2023.

⁸⁷ Interview with an environmental migrant, Padma Pukur union, Satkhira, July 2023.

4.2 *Freedom from Fear*

Environmental migrants are often subject to violence and targeted by traffickers, crooked employers and wicked individuals. These vulnerable people often find themselves in situations that result in exploitation, abuse, debt bondage, and other forms of modern slavery. Forced labour is very common among these migrants, and they may be forced to work in dangerous, exploitative or demeaning conditions in brick kilns, sweatshops, or construction sites without fair wages or protection from physical and mental abuse. This became evident during the FGDs with some of the migrants who had working experience at brick kilns. In the words of a migrant—

“We are not even excused from our duty even when we are sick. The day when we are totally unable to work due to illness, the Sardar (supervisor) deducts our wage.”⁸⁸

Besides, in most cases, environmental migrants are forced to get involved in the informal job sector, which is not protected by the Bangladesh Labour Act and Bangladesh Labour Rules.⁸⁹ Therefore, these vulnerable people are at great risk of being denied their fundamental rights and fair wages while working and are often exploited by their employers due to the absence of any workers’ protection. and access to the legal system.

What is more, these vulnerable people sometimes fall victim to a few corrupt local government representatives, particularly during the time of receiving aid, relief, and other government assistance. In many cases, the corrupted local representatives select beneficiaries based on loyalty rather than need. At times, they also demand bribes to include a migrant’s name in the distribution list. The absence of proper documentation and social safety nets exacerbates their sufferings, leaving them marginalised and vulnerable to various forms of abuse. As shared by one participant of an FGD—

“I did not receive any food or other assistance from the government. The chairman or the member did not document my name in the distribution list.”⁹⁰

⁸⁸ FGD, Shibpur union, Satkhira, July 2023.

⁸⁹ S. Islam, “We Need to Talk about Climate Migration,” *The Daily Star*, December 06, 2023.

⁹⁰ FGD, Gabura union, Satkhira, July 2023.

Among the most vulnerable groups of environmental migrants, women and girls face heightened risks, including sexual exploitation, forced marriage, and child marriage. They may be subjected to various forms of sexual violence, and there are concerns about the dangers of trafficking and sexual abuse of young women and children. Ritu Bharadwaj and her colleagues⁹¹ have highlighted in their research how women in Bangladesh who were widowed due to cyclone Sidr were subjected to human trafficking and forced labour. IOM⁹² has also acknowledged the nexus between environmental factors, climate change and human trafficking.

In addition, environmental migration can also give rise to conflict over scarce resources. In the place of destination, the arrival of large numbers of environmental migrants can strain local resources and infrastructure, leading to increased competition and potential conflicts between migrants and the host community. This can lead to feelings of resentment and hostility, creating a volatile situation, threatening social cohesion and jeopardising the security of the vulnerable ones.

4.3 *Freedom from Indignity*

The non-economic and intangible loss of environmental migrants is another crucial issue that is often either overlooked or neglected. This issue encompasses the losses and damages of migrants that are not economic in nature and cannot be comprehended in market value, such as respect, dignity, identity, well-being, and right to self-determination, among others.

One of the ways in which these non-economic losses manifest is through the loss of belongingness, identity, or social cohesion that results from moving or being displaced. This severely affects a person’s mental health and well-being. Living in an environment of insecurity causes increased anxiety and depression, which is common among migrants. Not having basic needs met, loss of support network and traditional practices also lead to grief and anxiety.⁹³ In the words of an environmental migrant living in the destination—

“Living here can sometimes be completely precarious. Jobs are insecure, health is at risk, and everything is uncertain. It is an undignified way to live. As we live in a place that is not ours, we accept that our life will be without dignity.”⁹⁴

⁹¹ Bharadwaj et al., *Climate-induced Migration and Modern Slavery*.

⁹² IOM, *Climate Change and Human Trafficking Nexus* (Thailand: IOM, 2016).

⁹³ Ayebe-Karlsson, “When the Disaster Strikes.”

⁹⁴ Interview with an environmental migrant, Gabura union, Satkhira, July 2023.

Another way in which these losses are experienced is through the sense of humiliation, which is often manifested among the environmental migrants. They feel disgraced when they cannot meet the expected social standards of living to which they were accustomed previously. Additionally, depression and shame can result from a lack of basic human needs at the household level, which disrupts their livelihoods and social norms. This perspective is further exemplified through the findings of FGDs and in-depth interviews, which attest that migrant people experience a loss of mental health and well-being. Many of them have expressed feelings of despair and emotional numbness about their future and their children and family.

These challenges are further compounded by the sense of discrimination, deprivation, and risk of losing cultural traditions. Discrimination against environmental migrants takes many forms, including exclusion from social services and benefits; denial of access to land and resources; being subject to violence and intimidation; and facing stereotypes and stigmatisation. The risk of cultural extinction is also a serious threat to the migrated people. When they are forced to leave their homes, they often lose their connection to their culture and traditions. This leads to a loss of identity and a sense of belongingness. All of these pose a serious threat to an environmental migrant's right to live with dignity.

5. Addressing the Human Security Concerns of Environmental Migrants

“Environmental migration is a genuine problem for Bangladesh. If we do not act accordingly, the situation will deteriorate in the future. However, if we have the right policies, right kind of strategy and action plan, the displacement can be reduced up to 80 per cent.”⁹⁵

It is now evident that environmental factors are becoming more and more prominent in driving people to migrate from their own places. These people are now at great risk of a spectrum of human security threats. Addressing such threats would require a deeper understanding of how these factors interact with the socio-economic vulnerabilities of migrants. As natural resources such as water, energy, and food continue to degrade and the adaptive capacity of the existing social and economic systems further erode, the adverse human security ramifications of these people will become even more prominent and pronounced. The following section intends to delve into potential options for both state and non-state actors to address the multifaceted human security concerns of the environmental migrants in Bangladesh. Nevertheless, it is important to note that suggestions for state and non-state actors are not mutually exclusive since a good deal

⁹⁵ Interview with academia, Dhaka, June 2023.

of coordination and cooperation is required among all the stakeholders to prepare and implement support strategies conducive to the well-being of the migrants.

5.1 *For State Actors*

Ensuring Economic Well-being and Financial Assistance to Environmental Migrants: Some of the major concerns of environmental migrants are related to their access to employment, livelihood and economic well-being. Since they migrate leaving everything behind and have to spend a good amount of money during their journey upon reaching their destination, they have very limited capital on hand to start over. Therefore, financial assistance is very important for them. As one of the participants of FGD highlights—

“We do not have any cash savings. If we can have some money to start a business, it would give us some financial stability and security. Like, if we could take out a loan to buy a cow, we could use the opportunity to earn some extra money for our family and children.”⁹⁶

Therefore, it is important for the government to provide economic support to environmental migrants through different financial assistance programmes.

Reaching Out to International Agencies for Financing: One possible option for financing and mobilisation of resources for the human security concerns of migrants is reaching out to international agencies. In this regard, the government could approach the UN Trust Fund for Human Security (UNTFHS) with relevant projects. Under its four priority areas—Agenda 2030, climate change, migration, and prevention and resilience—the UNTFHS provides funding to a variety of organisations working on various aspects of human security.⁹⁷ In order to be eligible for funding, organisations must submit a proposal that demonstrates how their project will contribute to the UNTFHS’s goals of promoting human security and reducing vulnerability. Since all four of these priority areas are extremely relevant for Bangladesh, the country can seize this opportunity to bid for funding and use it to address the challenges related to environmental migrants’ concerns. Besides, the government needs to continue its efforts to materialise the global Loss and Damage fund and ensure financial support from it in order to properly support the rehabilitation of the environmental migrants and enhance their transformative skills and capacities, making them better suited for employment.

⁹⁶ FGD, Shibpur union, Satkhira, July 2023.

⁹⁷ United Nations, “United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security,” accessed July 31, 2023, <https://www.un.org/humansecurity/#>.

Promoting Assisted Migration and Planned Relocation: Sometimes, instead of a reactive approach, proactive strategies are crucial in response to the challenges faced by environmental migrants. Assisted migration and planned relocation can serve as one such proactive measure to reduce their vulnerability. Some advantages of planned relocation include: reducing the risk of frequent displacement, reducing involuntary mobility, improving migrants' quality of life by providing access to better opportunities and resources, and building resilience to changing climatic conditions by helping them adapt to their new environment. Nevertheless, one issue that needs to be kept in mind is that any planned relocation should be based on the understanding of the affected community and relevant stakeholders. All the risk factors related to this need to be carefully evaluated. There are some good examples worldwide, like Fiji's internal relocation guideline—which is based on three pillars: human rights-based approach, livelihood-centred approach and human-centred approach—from which Bangladesh could learn in order to ensure basic human rights and other needs of the migrants.⁹⁸ Besides, there are also some existing examples of rehabilitating migrants inside Bangladesh, for instance, the Mongla case, where more than a thousand migrants are now living and working in the special economic zone. Professor Saleemul Huq, a prominent climate scientist from Bangladesh, believes Mongla can be a blueprint for other coastal areas across Bangladesh for resettling environmental migrants.⁹⁹

Securing Migrants' Access to Affordable Housing: Access to affordable housing is crucial for the health and well-being of individuals. However, in many cases, environmental migrants are often denied this basic human right. When people have access to safe and secure housing, they are less likely to experience stress, anxiety, and depression. Securing housing in a favourable location can also improve migrants' access to essential services such as healthcare and education. One way to address this challenge is by distributing *Khas*¹⁰⁰ land in a fair, transparent, and just manner to meet the needs of migrants. Concerned government agencies could also implement special land acquisition and land set-aside projects for these vulnerable individuals. These projects would involve the government purchasing or setting aside land for the exclusive use of migrants who have no place to live. The Government of Bangladesh (GoB) has already implemented some projects, such as the Ashrayan, Adarshagram/Guchogram projects, etc., which provide housing and land for homeless and landless persons. These sorts of projects could be considered

⁹⁸ Kupferberg, "Migration and Dignity."

⁹⁹ S. Huq cited in Yazhou Sun, "Climate Migration Pushes Bangladesh's Megacity to the Brink," Bloomberg, June 29, 2022, accessed December 08, 2023, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2022-06-28/bangladesh-flooding-fuels-climate-migration-to-dhaka>.

¹⁰⁰ *Khas* land is government-owned land that is not currently being used for any specific purpose.

for environmental migrants as well. Nevertheless, previous projects had some limitations, such as geographical remoteness, limited livelihood options, and lack of transparency in implementation¹⁰¹ which need to be addressed to make future projects effective. As one of the respondents from the academia underscores—

“Although these projects are equipped with good facilities, they lack livelihood options, which is a major concern.”¹⁰²

Strengthening Social Safety Net Programmes and Support Services:

Human security concerns are amplified when a migrant’s ability to cope and adapt is exhausted. This can occur when development, social protection, or adaptation actions are not properly implemented. Effective social protection mechanisms and social safety nets are necessary to address these issues, particularly in the face of climate and environmental crises. When access to these mechanisms and programmes is unavailable, especially for vulnerable groups such as women, children, minorities and disabled persons, they are at risk of human rights deprivation. While conducting the FGD, one participant stressed that—

“Most of the time, we are not included in any of the government support initiatives since our names are not on the beneficiary list in the new area.”¹⁰³

Thus, a comprehensive framework is needed to provide access to basic services and social safety nets for all vulnerable migrants. This would ensure that they have access to adequate food, decent jobs, health care, shelter, and justice system. The GoB already has a variety of safety net programmes, such as cash transfer, food security and employment generation programmes, stipend programmes, material transfers, credit support programmes, and assistance for special communities, among others along with multiple development projects and programmes.¹⁰⁴ It is, therefore, crucial to include environmental migrants within these programmes so that they can benefit from those programmes and thrive in their new destination.

¹⁰¹ Displacement Solutions, *Climate Displacement in Bangladesh: The Need for Urgent Housing, Land and Property (HLP) Solutions* (Geneva, Switzerland: Displacement Solutions, 2012).

¹⁰² Interview with academia, Dhaka, June 2023.

¹⁰³ FGD, Gabura union, Satkhira, July 2023.

¹⁰⁴ Government of Bangladesh, *Social Security Programs: Fiscal Year 2023–24*, Finance Division, Ministry of Finance, Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, accessed August 09, 2023, https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/page/a8e415d0_c5f2_4d5a_8c7c_bcd8beb88140/Social%20Security%20Programs_English_2023-24%20%282%29.pdf.

Ensuring Data Availability and Authenticity: In Bangladesh, no single agency is responsible for collecting and reporting data on displacement caused by environmental factors. As a result, there remains a discrepancy in the data provided by different agencies, and its coverage varies from year to year. Besides, there is no information on the migration pathways—reporting whether these people are moving somewhere else or returning to their original locations. What is more, the movement patterns of people who migrate due to environmental stress are often complicated and change frequently. These patterns often involve multiple short-distance moves. To properly study these migration patterns, detailed information about people’s movements over time and across different locations is needed. Therefore, it would be beneficial to have a designated entity responsible for tracking internal migrants, the nature of their migration, pathways, and current locations. In addition, it is high time to explore the possibility of collecting data from non-traditional sources, such as mobile phones and mobile phone networks, geographic information systems (GIS), and remote sensing technology. Data, which is collected over time and at a detailed geographic level, can help the concerned authority to understand environmental migrants’ mobility better and devise well-informed policy responses to their various human security concerns.

Devising Targeted Intervention: The adaptive capacity of environmental migrants is closely linked to social structures such as gender, class, caste, ethnicity, etc.¹⁰⁵ These migrants are a diverse group, facing different social, economic, and environmental risks depending on their individual circumstances and migration locations, among others, and the challenges they face are not the same. It is important to recognise this diversity while crafting policies and intervention strategies for displaced individuals and try to devise targeted interventions so that no specific group is denied attention. Gender-sensitive policies are particularly important, as environmental and climatic stress affect men and women differently. To accurately determine these differences, data must be collected and analysed based on age, gender, class, etc. This information can then be used to prepare policy decisions and ensure that the perspectives of all affected groups are taken into account.

Ensuring Inter-ministerial Coordination: Inter-ministerial coordination is essential for effectively addressing the challenges related to environmental migration. The issue of migration is complex and requires input from a variety of government

¹⁰⁵ F. Sugden et al., “A Framework to Understand Gender and Structural Vulnerability to Climate Change in the Ganges River Basin: Lessons from Bangladesh, India and Nepal,” *IWMI Working Paper No. 159* (Colombo: IWMI, 2014); T. Siddiqui, “Climate Change and Displacement: Locating the Most Vulnerable Groups,” *RMMRU Working Paper Series No. 49*, accessed December 14, 2023, <https://www.rmmru.org/newsite/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/WP-49.pdf>.

agencies, including the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), Ministry of Water Resources, MoDMR, Ministry of Agriculture, and the Ministry of Social Welfare, among others. Without inter-ministerial coordination and cooperation, it can be difficult to ensure that the needs of environmental migrants are being met and their human security concerns are addressed. One possible way to improve inter-ministerial coordination is to create a dedicated committee responsible for monitoring environmental migration related programmes and policies. The strategy paper developed by the MoDMR of the GoB emphasises on creating a Joint Partnership Platform as well as a National Task Force. These bodies would incorporate all relevant stakeholders to coordinate, communicate, and implement strategies for internally displaced persons. It is therefore important to put the strategy paper into action and establish these bodies to ensure coordination among different agencies. Another approach to facilitate coordination is to arrange workshops and training sessions for government officials and agencies regularly so that they can work effectively in harmony.

Formulating Migrant Responsive Comprehensive Policy Framework:

Considering the gravity of the issue, it is crucial that environmental migration is properly addressed and aptly mainstreamed in all relevant national plans and policies. Despite its significance, migration has not yet been fully integrated into development or environmental governance policies, and considerable challenges remain in mainstreaming migration issues into adaptation strategies. Poorly designed or unresponsive policies can result in increased competition for resources and friction between migrants and local communities, thus deteriorating the prevailing human security concerns of the migrants. To address this, existing regulatory and policy frameworks must be comprehensively reviewed to ensure that the needs and concerns of environmental migrants are adequately reflected. In addition to developing new policies, it is equally important to ensure that existing policies and strategies are properly implemented, especially the newly formulated National Strategy Paper on Internal Displacement Management and its action plan.

Ensuring Transparency and Accountability of the Government

Agencies: Most respondents of the in-depth interviews have highlighted the lack of transparency in various government-assisted programmes and social safety net programmes. Besides, they have also mentioned about the lack of accountability among some of the local government representatives. To identify genuine migrants with dire needs and make the response mechanism migrant-oriented, it is important to implement all plans, policies, and strategies with transparency and free of corruption. Furthermore, proper mechanisms should be in place to hold the concerned authorities accountable for their duties and responsibilities.

5.2 *For Non-state Actors*

Ensuring Proper Identification of the Environmental Migrants and Extend Support System: NGOs play a crucial role in alleviating many of the human security concerns of environmental migrants by carrying out various programmes, like microcredit, relief and aids, training programmes, capacity development, etc. However, it is crucial for them to properly identify the migrants, especially those who are the most vulnerable ones and are in great need of such assistance. Most of the participants of the FGDs and in-depth interviews revealed that they have not received proper support from NGOs working in vulnerable areas. To overcome such challenges, NGOs need to document vulnerable migrants properly and bring them under their support system. If possible, they should extend the number of beneficiaries so that they can serve the maximum number of environmental migrants.

Improving Coordination Among Different NGOs: One common challenge for the NGOs working in rural areas is duplication of intervention, a concern also highlighted by the interview respondents. This ultimately resulted in resource wastage. Therefore, it is important to increase coordination among different NGOs, which can be achieved by sharing their intervention objectives, target groups, knowledge, experience, and resources so that their interventions become fruitful, sustainable, and truly help environmental migrants. Another possible way to improve the coordination is to establish a coordination committee incorporating NGOs working with environmental migrants, government agencies, civil society, and affected communities.

Facilitating Skill Development and Capacity Building of Environmental Migrants: Environmental migrants often lack the necessary skills and education to find employment within new communities when they move to their destination. As one migrant described—

“We have very limited job opportunities as we do not have the necessary skills. We have to work as daily labourers or depend on pulling rickshaws and vans to support ourselves and our families after migrating.”¹⁰⁶

Therefore, there is a need for robust programmes on vocational training and skill development to help environmental migrants acquire the skills they need to find jobs and rebuild their lives. Proper assessments need to be done to understand the

¹⁰⁶ Interview with an environmental migrant, Padma Pukur union, Satkhira, July 2023.

migration patterns of these individuals, their current skill and education levels, and the types of training they require to find employment at their destination. Based on this information, NGOs can devise new training programmes so that the migrants can be equipped with the proper skill set to survive.

Promoting Research, Incorporating Academia, Government, and NGOs: Policymakers and concerned stakeholders need to understand how and when environmental and climate stress can impact biodiversity and ecosystem services, putting pressure on the lives and livelihoods of affected communities. It is, therefore, crucial to conduct research that incorporates educational institutions, academia, government, and NGOs to better understand migration factors, their concerns and adaptive capacity, and available support systems. These include identifying the strengths and weaknesses of existing support systems, as well as developing new and innovative support services and social safety net programmes to meet the needs of migrants. The mental and emotional health needs of environmental migrants are often overlooked. Thus, it is important to conduct more research on the mental state of these individuals.

Developing a Positive Approach to Migration: Developing a positive approach and mindset to migration is important for upholding the respect and dignity of environmental migrants. This requires empathy, awareness, and a commitment to foster inclusivity. It is crucial to educate the host community and others about the environmental factors that lead to migration and recognise that environmental migrants are often forced to leave their homes due to circumstances beyond their control. They are entitled to basic human rights and need protection from abuse, indignity, and humiliation. It is also important to avoid stereotypes and prejudice that might put the human security of migrants in peril. It is, therefore, essential to create a welcoming environment for environmental migrants. This can be achieved by educating the host community through various workshops and awareness programmes that will stress the importance of creating a conducive environment where migrants will feel safe and honoured.

6. Concluding Remarks

The bleak future of environmental migration is now beyond dispute. As global temperature is expected to continue to rise, the severity and frequency of natural disasters will subsequently amplify, leaving hundreds and thousands of vulnerable people with limited options to adapt. This will result in an increasing number of people being forced to leave their homes and relocate, putting their human security at risk. Bangladesh, being a disaster hot spot and one of the most climate-vulnerable countries, is also in a critical situation where migration due to

environmental and climatic factors is now a hard reality. Environmental migrants are now facing a spectrum of human security challenges, which has been explored in the paper under three distinct human security pillars—freedom from fear, want and indignity. It is almost certain that environmental and climatic factors will continue to ravage the lives and livelihoods of hundreds and thousands of people in the coming days with increasing severity and intensity.

In dealing with the concerns of environmental migration, there is now a greater need for a paradigm shift. Instead of the current reactive approach, it is crucial to adopt a more proactive, durable, and human-centred approach that focuses on the needs and rights of migrants and their human security. This approach will help stakeholders, including government agencies, NGOs, civil society, and others, design and implement policies and strategies that are conducive to the protection and sustainable management of environmental migrants. Since the human security approach is people-centred, it will be helpful in addressing migrants' concerns in a more humane way and promoting peaceful social integration for them. It is important to recognise that every person displaced due to environmental factors has the right to receive support to rebuild their lives. The existing negative narrative and stereotypes around migration should also be properly addressed so that migrants do not face abuse and humiliation at their destinations. It is also of paramount importance to better integrate the human security aspects into multidimensional efforts to address the vulnerabilities and concerns of environmental migrants and mainstream the migration issue in all environmental and developmental plans and strategies of the country.

Annex A

Table 1: List of Key Informant Interviews (KII)

No. of Respondents ¹⁰⁷	Details
Two respondents	Department of Political Science, University of Dhaka
One respondent	Department of Economics, Khulna University
One respondent	Climate Change and International Development Studies, Utrecht University
One respondent	Centre for Sustainable Development (CSD), University of Liberal Arts
One respondent	Satkhira municipality, Satkhira
One respondent	Creating Climate Resilience Communities (CCRC), Munshigonj union, Satkhira
One respondent	BRAC, Satkhira
Two community volunteers	Munshigonj union and Padma Pukur union, Satkhira

Table 2: List of In-depth Interviews with Environmental Migrants

No. of respondents	Details
Three environmental migrants	Gabura union, Satkhira
Two environmental migrants	Padma Pukur union, Satkhira
Three environmental migrants	Shibpur union, Satkhira

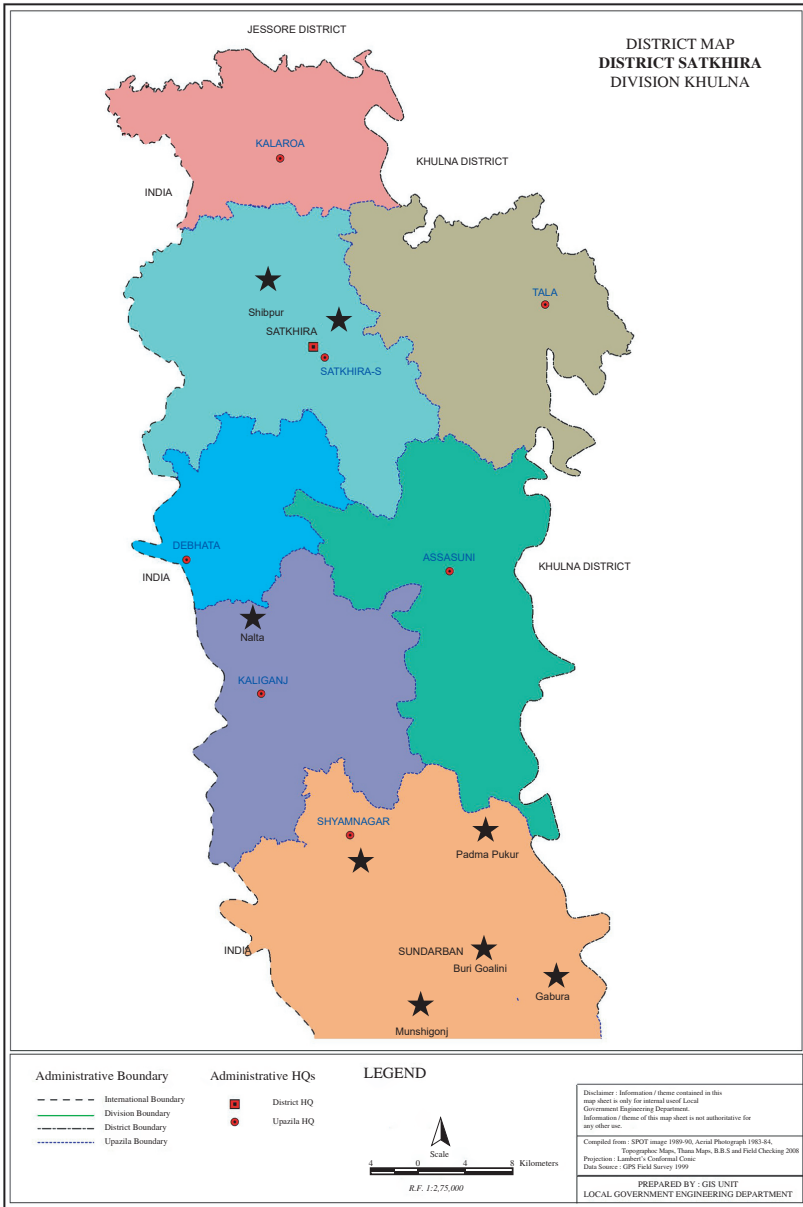
Table 3: List of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

Study Sites	Focus Groups
Gabura union, Shyamnagar upazila	1
Padma Pukur union, Shyamnagar upazila	1
Munshigonj union, Shyamnagar upazila	1
Shibpur union, Satkhira Sadar upazila	1

¹⁰⁷ Two respondents are affiliated with the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU).

Annex B

Figure: Satkhira District Map and Field Study Areas¹⁰⁸



¹⁰⁸ Adapted from <http://oldweb.lged.gov.bd/UploadedDocument/DistrictMap/satkhira/satkhira.jpg>.