Remittance and Social Resilience among Migrant Households in Rural Bangladesh

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Background

- Migration is a key livelihood strategy of many rural and urban Bangladeshi households.

- With regards to internal migration, the 1991 Census recorded that six per cent of households’ move each year (Garrett and Chowdhury, 2004).

- From 1976 to 2015, 9.6 million Bangladeshis had gone abroad as short-term labour migrants (BMET, 2016).

- Both internal and international remittances are one of the main ways in which migration can influence the social and economic changes in the migrants’ places of origin.
Background

- By 2001, the amount of international remittances received had increased to US$2 billion, further rising to US$15 billion in 2015.

- Empirical research on internal migration in Bangladesh found that
  - two thirds of temporary and half of permanent migrants had remitted money to their root or branch families in the village (Afsar, 2002)
  - 60 per cent of respondents remit money (Bhuyan et al., 2001)
  - 41 per cent of the never married migrant workers who work in garment factories and live without their parents send remittances to their village of origin (Naved et. Al., 2001)
  - A study of female domestic workers and rickshaw pullers who temporarily migrate to Dhaka city also showed that remittances constitute the single largest source of cash income for their family (Siddiqui and Sikder, 2009).
Development Impact

- International remittances have contributed towards the Gross Domestic Product (GDP, 11 per cent in 2014), reducing the unemployment (5 lac in 2015) and poverty rate (6 per cent by World Bank) in Bangladesh.

- The HIES of 2000, based on 7440 households shows that remittance income from abroad accounted for 7.5 per cent of the total rural expenditure and four per cent of the urban expenditure.

- The HIES in 2010 reports that household income from gifts and remittances accounted for 9.8 per cent at the national level, 12 per cent in the rural areas and 5.9 per cent in the urban areas in 2005.

- The HIES in 2010 also reports that, in all divisions, the income, consumption and savings per household of remittance receivers far exceeds that of households who do not receive remittances.
Academic Research Gap

- Most of the empirical studies in Bangladesh were based on quantitative and focused causes of migration, migration behaviour, motivation for remitting.
- These studies have generally compiled and analysed data about migrants at the place of destination.
- Studies do not allow an in-depth understanding of how migrant remittances impact on economic, social and cultural development and the livelihood strategies of those left behind.
- Nor do they provide in-depth insights into the contribution of remittance household economies to understand how the migrant households use remittances to reduce the risk and buttress themselves against shocks and stresses.
- The effects of remittances in terms of the experience of the women left behind in the place of origin remains to be explored.
Research Objectives

- The study had two broad aims:
  - To explore how migrant households use remittances
  - To investigate the way these remittances enable migrant households to respond against shocks and stresses.
Conceptual Framework: Social Resilience

- The term ‘resilience’ originates from the Latin word *resilire* that means ‘to leap back’.
- The Oxford Dictionary defines resilience as ‘the ability of a substance or object to spring back into shape; elasticity’ and ‘the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties; toughness’.
- Since it first came into use in the early 1970s, the concept of resilience has gained in popularity and has been embraced by researchers from diverse fields and with wide-ranging interests, including psychology, sociology, geography, anthropology, public health, ecology, technology and communication have drawn on the concept and applied it to their research settings.
- Plodinec (2009) explains that the concept has generated a at least 40 definitions representing a range of research areas, including engineering, physical science, ecology, social systems and community studies.
## Conceptual Framework: Social Resilience

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Resilience Alliance (2007)</td>
<td>The concept to socio-ecological systems to describe the ability to absorb disturbances, undergo change and self-organise and retain the same basic structure and ways of functioning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Psychologists (Rutter, 1993, Masten and Gewirtz, 2006)</td>
<td>Describe an individual’s response to physiological vulnerability and risk experiences</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ecology (Holling and Meffe: 1996, Handmer and Dovers, 1996; Brand and Jax, 2007)</td>
<td>The ability of an ecosystem to recover from environmental stress, such as fires, drought, climate change and pollution</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social and environmental scientists (Folke, 2006, Sapountzaki, 2007 and Umetsu et al., 2010)</td>
<td>The capacity of a system to absorb disturbance and re-organize while undergoing change so as to still retain essentially the same function, structure, identity and feedbacks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social scientists (Adger, 1997, 2000; Abesamis et al., 2006 and Sutton and Tobin, 2012, Maguire and Cartwright, 2008: 5)</td>
<td>links between social resilience and ecological resilience. the capacity of people to learn from their problems and incorporate learning into their interactions with the social and physical environment.</td>
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Link between Social Resilience and Remittances

- Migration and remittance researchers have been relatively slow in drawing on the concept of social resilience, and when they do so, they use the concept as a device to measure recovery from hardship.

- Remittances from overseas migrants contribute to building assets (physical, natural, financial, social, political and human) and act as a critical ‘buffer’ to withstanding shocks and stresses, although this passing remark is not explained (Adger, 2000 and Adger et al., 2002, Stevanovic, 2012, Sabates-Wheeler and Waite, 2003 an de Haan, 1999 ad de Haas, 2007)

- In the present study, the concept of resilience is uses in a descriptive sense, to draw attention to how remittance income plays a critical role in changing the life circumstances of migrant villagers by enabling them to manage their circumstances, adapt to crises, and plan for the future.
Notes to Methodology

- The broader research underpinning this paper was informed by an ethnographic methodological approach, with semi-structured interviews used as the main tool of data collection.

- The 480 completed questionnaires assisted in identifying the most appropriate migrant households to interview.

- From the survey data, a total of 36 households were identified for interviews.

- The fieldwork was undertaken over a nine month period.
The Villages
The 55-year-old, Sabour Miah Khandakar, is the head of an internal migrant household in the Baynagar village.

- Sabour Miah: How can health be good if there is no food?
Author: Why? Don’t you see a doctor?
Sabour Miah: Yes. (nods his head) ... Yes we go ... Gives us vitamins.
Author: Did the doctor say anything else?
Sabour Miah: Told us to eat more food ...
Where would food come from? ... Only vitamins? ... (pats his stomach) ... If you have no food (points to stomach) this world is nothing.
Remittances and Household Food Security

- Sabour Miah: Praise be to Allah. We eat better now. Lentils and rice.

Author: How many meals a day?
Sabour Miah: Three times.

Author: At what times of the day?
Sabour Miah: Morning, afternoon and night.

Author: Do you have anything in the late afternoon?
Sabour Miah: (Smirks).
Remittances and Life Chances

Josna Akhter who is a female head of an internal migrant household in *Baynagar*

“My daughters are studying. [I] have to provide food at certain times ... one gets hungry if one works; one also becomes hungry if one studies ... You become weak if you do not eat and your head will not work”

“My father’s condition was not that good, could not make us study because of money. Married me off at a young age ... I conceived my first child at the age of 17 ... I have been ill ever since. Money is drained away by buying medicine ... I learnt that my daughters would meet the same fate as me, if I married them off early.”
Remittances and Maintain Privacy and Social Prestige

Lina Akhter, a 50 year-old female head of an international migrant household

The families had more female members in their households and were under pressure to add new rooms for maintaining privacy.

“People look at your house when you want a good groom ... A lot of people would be interested in a relationship as the household has a migrant overseas ... We will lose face if the house condition is poor. People will think we have no money.”
Remittances and Social Capital

Siraj Mollah, a male headed internal migrant household

- “Many people say many things…. Some ask why I don’t marry off my daughter…. People think my daughter is not getting married … We don’t receive any good proposals … They speak even more when they see my daughters outside the house … I asked my daughter to stay at my home and do no more studying”. 
Remittances, Household Economy and Division of Labour

Roshna of internal migrant household

- She migrated to her current village through marriage.
- Roshna illustrates, the remittance money spent on purchasing a mobile phone proved critical to her lifestyle in a number of ways.
- It enabled her to maintain contact with her husband, made it possible to maintain close and active links with other members of her social networks, and enabled her to carry out a range of work and household duties.
Uneven Geography of Remittances

- From the discussion thus far, one may be tempted to present an overwhelmingly positive narrative of the social impact of remittances, and conclude that all participants—both individual migrants and migrant households—benefit equally from the migration and/or relocation experience and the resources that it generates.

- The social and economic benefits of remittances are not equally distributed among all migrant households, as one would anticipate.

- Some households benefit far more than others from the resources derived from remittances and the experiences of engaging in remittances are quite uneven.

- One in every three households in the present study found that remittance income did not result in an automatic increase in family income.

- Indeed, some households suffered from diverse internal and external difficulties that either impacted the generation of remittances or on the households’ expenses.
Uneven Geography of Remittances
Conclusion

- First, remittances have made migrant households more resilient, first, by making it possible for households to ‘live with change and uncertainty.
- Second, migrant households are more resilient because remittances have enabled them to extend their options.
- Third, remittances have given migrant households access to ‘different types of knowledge’.
- Fourth, access to migrant remittances has enhanced the resilience of migrant households also by ‘creating opportunity for self-organization’.
- Fifth, not every migrant household has benefitted in the same way from remittances, and the poorest of the poor, including some affected by unanticipated crises like the death of family members, continue to struggle with challenges and adversity.
Conclusion

What the present study highlights is that it is not the remittances *per se* that generates problems for households, but a range of social and household specific circumstances and unanticipated dramatic events that can make it unfavourable for households to rise above their problems, even with remittances.
Thank You