



# Rural-urban dichotomy and convergence: emerging realities in Bangladesh

Rita Afsar

**SUMMARY:** *This paper describes the main causes and consequences of rural-urban migration in Bangladesh and explores their implications for poverty alleviation and spatial distribution policies. Amongst the main factors affecting people's mobility are the impact of structural adjustment and privatization on the country's economy and the related changes in the structure of employment. The manufacturing and service sectors have rapidly expanded in rural areas, and in urban areas there is substantial relocation within the tertiary sector and significant change in the gender composition of the manufacturing sector. Migration has become more complex, diversified and multi-dimensional in nature. Gaps between rural and urban areas with respect to service provision are also narrowing, as both rural and urban poor households face insufficient access to them. While recognizing the importance of migration and other processes in rural-urban interactions, policy makers and planners must address the issues of urban management, resource transfer from rich to poor, diversification of employment opportunities for the poor, and strong measures for the provision of social services for the poor in both rural and urban areas.*

*Rita Afsar is a Research Fellow at the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, Dhaka. This article is largely based on her doctoral thesis on "Causes, Consequences and Challenges of Rural-Urban Migration in Bangladesh" approved by the University of Adelaide. She has been working in the areas of rural-urban migration, urbanization, urban poverty, social development and gender issues for the last 18 years and has published several articles and co-authored books on these topics.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

**CONTEMPORARY BANGLADESH IS** a mixture of tradition and modernity. With a per capita GNP of US\$ 240 in mid-1995, it is a poor peasant society with a small but dominant urban and modern sector. It is the World's ninth most populous nation and one of the most rapidly urbanizing. From a very low urban base (7.6 per cent) in 1970, the level of urbanization has increased to 20 per cent in the 1990s, an annual increase of 3.4 per cent during 1975-1995.<sup>(1)</sup> The annual growth rate for the urban population was 6 per cent between 1970 and 1996 compared to 1.5 per cent for the rural population. Whilst rural-urban migration has remained a major component of urban growth since 1970, the reclassification of urban areas has also become important since the 1980s. The designation of new urban areas accounted for only 8 per cent of the total urban population between 1961

**Address: Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies E-17, Agargaon, Shere-e-Bangla Nagar Dhaka-1207, Bangladesh, tel. 880-2-811079 (office), 880-2-9124755 (home); fax: 880-2-813023. E-mail: rita@bangla.net**

1. Afsar, R. (1995), "Causes, consequences and challenges of rural-urban migration in Bangladesh", PhD dissertation, University of Adelaide, Australia.

2. Existing estimates suggest that the internal (rural-urban) migration rate was 51.8 per cent in the 1991 census and the natural population growth contribution to urbanization was around 35 per cent (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (1997), *Bangladesh Population Census 1991: Urban Area Report (Vol.3)*, Statistics Division, Ministry of Planning, Dhaka; also Jordan, D. (1993), "Urbanization in Bangladesh and Dhaka", Dhaka Metropolitan Development Planning (DMDP)). Between 1981 and 1991, urban areas grew substantially from 5,230.15 square kilometres to 9,576.90 square kilometres, an 83 per cent increase for the period or a 6 per cent annual increase (exponential). During the same period, the urban population increased from 13.5 to 22 million, an annual average growth of 5 per cent. Thus, the urban area expanded more than the population growth rate during the inter-censal period. Thirty new municipalities were added at the time of the 1991 census, whose numbers went from 77 in 1981 to 174 by August 1998. Simultaneously, 30 new urban areas were designated and, as a consequence, the number of urban centres rose from 492 in 1981 to 522 in 1991, thus increasing the urban population by nearly 1.5 million during the inter-censal period.

3. Zelinsky, W. (1971), "The hypothesis of the mobility transition", *Geographical Review* No.61, pages 219-249.

and 1974 but its contribution to urban growth increased to one-third between 1974 and 1981. Nearly 20 per cent of urban growth from 1981 to 1991 can be attributed to the reclassification of urban areas and the remaining 45 per cent to rural-urban migration, with natural population growth accounting for the remaining 35 per cent.<sup>(2)</sup> UN estimates of urban growth also suggest that reclassification and migration will remain its major components in Bangladesh until 2000 and beyond, like most other South and South-East Asian countries.

Rapid and persistent migration not only affects spatial distribution patterns but also requires economic and social adjustment at various levels of society, and often leads to a broad range of consequences both beneficial and detrimental in areas of origin and destination. However, there is a lack of understanding about the process of rural-urban migration and the potential for rural-urban convergence, economic development and social change. Migration is often considered as a one-off phenomenon of a permanent nature. Its flexibility, dynamism and diversity are rarely taken into consideration in the formulation of spatial development policies. Existing evidence suggests that rural to urban transition is more than simply an increasing level of concentration of the population, and involves a fundamental social and economic change in society.<sup>(3)</sup> Increasingly, the utility of the simple urban/rural dichotomous classification is questioned.<sup>(4)</sup> It is argued that, as a result of the major changes occurring in the mobility of people, goods, services, capital and ideas, there is considerable blurring of the distinction between urban and rural populations.

This paper describes the factors contributing to rural-urban convergence in Bangladesh and the implications of rural-urban linkages, particularly in terms of poverty alleviation, spatial distribution and development oriented policies. It draws on the research on the causes and consequences of rural-urban migration from a cross-section of slum and non-slum households of different categories of migrants.<sup>(5)</sup>

Data were generated from 710 randomly selected migrant and non-migrant households from four randomly selected wards of Dhaka. The 1989-90 electoral rolls served as the sampling frame in the absence of census data at the time of the survey. Sample households were stratified proportionate to population on the basis of the occupation of the electorate.<sup>(6)</sup> Supplementary censuses were also conducted in all four areas to include slum and squatter settlements and boarding houses many of which were not represented in the voters list. The survey data were supplemented by more detailed case studies of returnees as well as "failed" migrants and families of temporary migrants in areas of origin through a tracer survey to examine both determinants and consequences of migration. Other important data sources for the paper are the Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (BDHS) and Rahman et al.'s study on 62 villages in Bangladesh,<sup>(7)</sup> and a recent census of ten slum and squatter settlements in Dhaka conducted by the author in 1996. Moreover, references are made to the household expenditure survey and labour force survey, and other relevant macro level data gener-

4. Hugo, G. J. (1992), "Migration and rural-urban linkages in the ESCAP region", paper prepared for a pre-conference seminar at the Fourth Population Conference on Migration and Urbanization: Inter-Relationship with Socio-Economic Development and Evolving Policy Issues, Seoul, Republic of Korea.

5. See reference 1.

6. Occupational categories were services, business, lawyers, doctors, engineers, transport workers, labourers, students and others.

7. Rahman, H. Z., Hossain, M. and B. Sen (1996), "1987-94 Dynamics of rural poverty in Bangladesh", final report, Bangladesh Institute Of Development Studies, (mimeo), Dhaka; also Mitra, S.N., Nawab Ali, M., Islam, S., Cross, A.R. and S. Tulshi (1994), *Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey 1993-94*, National Institute of Population Research and Training, Calverton, Maryland, Mitra and Associates, and Macro International Inc.

8. Khan, A.R. (1995), "A quarter century of economic development in Bangladesh: success and failures," *Bangladesh Development Studies* Vol. XXIII, the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, Dhaka, September-December, page 11.

9. Share of agriculture to GDP was 49 and 33 per cent, respectively, in 1975/76 and 1994/95. During the same period, the share of the construction, and public administration and services sectors rose by 4.3 and 8 per cent, respectively (see reference 8). However, agriculture's share to GDP was further reduced to 18 per cent in 1995-96, (see reference 12).

10. Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (1995), *Report on the Household Expenditure Survey 1991-92*, Statistics Division, Ministry of Planning, Dhaka.

ated by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS). A range of available secondary materials and micro-level data, both in this country and outside, were also consulted for the sake of comparison.

## II. FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO RURAL-URBAN INTERACTIONS

**RURAL-URBAN INTERACTIONS** largely depend on structural conditions such as changes in the social, political and economic environment at the global, national and local levels which, in turn, are likely to affect the livelihoods of the rural and urban poor.

### a. Structural Adjustment and Change

At the global level, an increasing emphasis on structural adjustment and privatization by aid-giving agencies resulted in the expansion of private investment and radical changes in the composition of exports in Bangladesh. Merchandise exports as a proportion of GDP has increased rapidly, from 5.6 to 9.9 per cent between 1980 and 1993.<sup>(8)</sup> The phenomenal growth in the export of ready-made garments, from an insignificant level in 1975-80 to 54.3 per cent of merchandise exports in 1990-93, contributed largely to such growth. Between 1989-90 and 1994-95, the manufacturing sector registered 100 per cent annual average growth in private investment, suggesting exclusive monopoly by the private sector. The development of the export oriented ready-made garment industry by private entrepreneurs is the most significant factor in the development of formal manufacturing, followed by shrimp, electronics, leather, etc. Because of increasing demand and a liberalization policy, activities covering trade, banking and insurance, health, education and professional services are predominantly managed and owned by private entrepreneurs. There has also been a significant increase in the contribution of the trade and services sector to the GDP from nearly two-fifths in 1990 to nearly half in 1995, and private investment grew at an annual average rate of 69.3 per cent. Alongside structural changes in the composition of output and employment, the proportion of GDP contributed by agriculture has declined by 16.5 per cent, and a corresponding increase can be noted in the contribution of the construction, public administration and services sector between 1975-76 and 1994-95.<sup>(9)</sup> However, GDP contributed by the manufacturing sector changed very little during this period. With the expansion of private investment and changes in the structure of the economy, the private informal and formal sectors are expanding rapidly, whilst the public and autonomous sectors are shrinking. Thus, in 1995-96, the private informal sector absorbed 85 per cent of employed persons aged 15 years and over, the private formal sector 10 per cent, and the public autonomous bodies only 5 per cent.<sup>(10)</sup>

## b. Structural Changes in Employment

Existing estimates from household level data suggest that employment in the rural non-farm (RNF) sector (excluding livestock, poultry, fisheries and forestry) grew by 5.9 per cent annually between 1988 and 1995 compared with a decline in agricultural wage labour of 1.7 per cent during the same period.<sup>(11)</sup> This decline can be attributed largely to high rates of migration by functionally landless groups and to greater employment opportunities generated by the rural non-farm sector. This sector contributed 42 per cent to GDP in 1995-96 compared to 40 and 18 per cent, respectively, for the urban and agriculture sectors,<sup>(12)</sup> suggesting strong potential and high dynamism in the RNF and urban sectors.

On the other hand, since 1996, agriculture related occupations have gradually become more significant in urban areas. An expanded definition of the workforce, to detect women workers who had hitherto been bypassed by male biased survey techniques,<sup>(13)</sup> and the expansion of urban boundaries to include surrounding areas where agriculture is still one of the major occupations, have contributed to this changing pattern. Table 1 gives figures for four major cities, showing the proportion of employed persons involved in agriculture in their various urban areas. In all four, the city corporations and municipal areas contain an insignificant proportion of people involved in agriculture, whereas their "other urban areas" contain a significant proportion. Rajshahi, which has the lowest urban population, also has the largest proportion engaged in agriculture. On the other hand, although Dhaka has the highest urban population, a more significant proportion is engaged in agriculture than in Chittagong. This suggests that level of urbanization is not the sole determinant of occupational patterns.

Due to increasing interaction between rural and urban areas, and improvements in road infrastructure and transportation networks, there is a growing incidence of reverse investment as groups of migrants invest in and supervise agriculture in peri-urban and rural areas as their principal occupation. In her recent study of slum and non-slum households in Dhaka, the author found that more than one-third of the migrant non-slum households have cultivable land in rural areas and small and intermediate towns, and more than a quarter derive regular income from that land.

Both the manufacturing and services sectors, which traditionally were characterized as the major sources of employment for urban dwellers, have expanded rapidly in rural areas. The change is particularly significant in the case of the services sector, which absorbs one-fifth of rural workers. Many other countries in the ESCAP region, most notably Indonesia, share the same experience,<sup>(14)</sup> and household-level surveys support this trend. Rahman et al.<sup>(15)</sup> found that rural processing and industry, and services as sources of primary occupations for adults, have increased by 10 and 5.5 per cent annually, respectively, between 1988 and 1996. The expansion of the financial and banking sector, micro-credit lending to women's self-employ-

11. Hossain, M. (1988), *Nature and Impact of Green Revolution in Bangladesh*, Research Report No.67, IFPRI, Washington DC.

12. Shilpi, Farhad (1998), "The rural non-farm sector in Bangladesh: policies, constraints and potentials", draft paper prepared for the World Bank, Dhaka.

13. Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (1992d), *Report on Labour Force Survey 1989*, Statistics Division, Ministry of Planning, Dhaka, page 15.

14. See reference 4.

15. See reference 7, Rahman et al. (1996).

**Table 1: Distribution of Employed Persons by Agricultural and Non-agricultural Occupation in the Major Metropoli and their Constituent Parts**

	Total population ('000s)*	Agriculture (%)	Non-agriculture (%)
<b>Dhaka</b>			
Dhaka mega-city	6,487	4.9	95.1
City corporation & municipalities	4,232	1.2	98.8
Other urban areas	2,255	16.6	83.4
<b>Chittagong</b>			
Chittagong SMA	2,080	4.2	95.8
City corporation	1,393	0.9	99.7
Other urban areas	687	11.8	88.3
<b>Khulna</b>			
Khulna SMA	921	8.1	91.9
City corporation	663	2.8	97.2
Other urban areas	299	23.6	76.4
<b>Rajshahi</b>			
Rajshahi SMA	507	28.5	71.5
City corporation	294	4.8	95.2
Other urban areas	213	60.1	39.9

\*Total population includes both employed persons and others who are not in the labour force.

SOURCE: Compiled and computed from Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (1997), *Bangladesh Population Census 1991: Urban Area Report (Volume 3)*, Statistics Division, Ministry of Planning, Dhaka.

ment and trading activities and, finally, the increasing number of rural teachers, NGO workers and para-medics can be identified as some of the important factors which help explain the growth in employment in the rural tertiary sector.

In 1974, an overwhelming majority of the urban labour force was absorbed as domestic servants/workers in various personal and community services. The remaining labour force was mainly absorbed in the trade, hotel and restaurants (17 per cent) and manufacturing sectors (16 per cent), followed by the transport, storage and communication sector (8.5 per cent). By 1996, however, the size of the labour force absorbed in the community and personal services had declined sharply in urban areas from 41 to 23 per cent. Simultaneously, there was a significant expansion in the trade (23 per cent), construction (3.2 per cent) and transport sectors (10.5 per cent) as evident from the relative share of the urban labour force in each of these major industries. Thus, within the tertiary sector, there is a substantial relocation of the labour force between 1974 and 1995/96 in urban areas. Although the overall size of the manufacturing sector did not change much, women's employment in this sector increased from nearly 4 per cent to 20 per cent during the same reference period.

Rapid expansion in the private transport, formal manufacturing, and private housing and construction sectors generate demand for unskilled and semi-skilled labour and, as a result, there is increasing migration for job related reasons and better employment opportunities. The employment patterns of the ur-

16. These are wide-bodied auto rickshaws which can accommodate 10-15 persons at a time. Although highly polluting two-stroke vehicles, they are one of the cheapest and fastest modes of intra-city group transportation.

17. Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (1996), *Report on the Labour Force Survey 1995-96*, Statistics Division, Ministry of Planning, Dhaka.

ban poor, who constitute 80-90 per cent of migrants, illustrate this point more clearly.

Thirty-three per cent of men and 16 per cent of women of active age in the slum and squatter settlements were involved, respectively, in the transport sector and garment factories in 1996, compared to 19 and 6 per cent in 1991 (see Table 2). Increases in the numbers of rickshaws, cars, *tempo*<sup>(16)</sup> and private buses that employ poor migrants as drivers, conductors, helpers, etc. are illustrated by the annual growth rates for rickshaws, auto-rickshaws and buses between 1990 and 1995 which stand at 6.7, 13.8 and 5.1, respectively. However, public sector buses constitute a fraction only (nearly 1 per cent) of the total buses on the road. Moreover, statistics provided by Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) show a slight decline in the number of buses on the roads from 228 in 1990-91 to 124 in 1994-95. Thus, the growth in the transport sector, which absorbed one-third of urban poor men, occurred mainly in the private informal sector, with a substantial proportion of the employed population in this sector being self-employed. There has also been an expansion in the construction sector which, in 1996, absorbed nearly one-fifth of men and one-tenth of women of active age, almost double the figure for 1991. Labour force survey data suggest a significant (13 per cent) annual average growth rate for the country as a whole in this sector for the same period,<sup>(17)</sup> while business, trading, hawking and related self-employed activities remain almost the same because the slight decline found in men's employment is compensated for by the slight increase in women's employment in this sector between 1991 and 1996.

**Table 2: Occupational Pattern of Population (aged over ten) by Gender, and Slum and Non-slum Residence in Dhaka City (percentage distribution)**

Type of occupation	Urbanization and urban poor 1992				Dhaka slum census, 1996	
	Slum		Non-slum		Male	Female
	Male	Female	Male	Female		
Transport operator	18.9	0.7	1.0	-	33.3	0.0
Garments & other industrial worker	7.6	6.0	1.4	0.8	5.9	15.8
Construction/wage work	10.0	3.2	0.8	0.1	16.2	7.6
Trading/hawking/other self-employed	18.1	2.4	22.7	1.7	14.8	4.1
Salaried service	22.0	2.0	31.0	4.9	4.9	1.2
Domestic service	0.6	8.6	-	-	0.8	12.7
Unemployed	10.8	4.8	4.3	2.5	7.8	5.8
Housewife	0.3	57.3	-	50.6	-	38.5
Dependent	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.1	2.6	4.1
Others	11.4	14.7	38.4	39.3	13.5	10.2
All occupations (number)	323	292	920	788	5,371	6,011

SOURCE: Afsar, R. and M. Hossain (1992), "Urbanisation and urban poor in Bangladesh: issues, trends and challenges", mimeo, Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, Dhaka, Bangladesh; also Afsar, R. (1996), "Application of demographic techniques in the analysis of gender biased urban poverty situation in Bangladesh", paper presented at the Australian National Population Association, Adelaide, Australia, December 2-6, 1996.

### c. Difficulties in Adhering to Rural-Urban Administrative Boundaries and Normative Standards for the Provision of Employment and Basic Services

In defining rural employment and activity patterns, one often cannot stick to a conventional definition of “rural” by population size and types of services, but must also include rural towns and peri-urban areas along with villages, as people generally have access to employment in those places. Similarly, in the urban manufacturing and services sectors, a significant proportion of the labour force is composed of temporary migrants from rural areas and commuters from peri-urban areas. In Bangladesh, an urban area must include amenities such as roads, electricity, community centres, water supply, sanitation and a sewerage system, among other things. As a result, a significant gap exists between rural and urban households with regard to access to piped water, a septic/modern toilet, electricity and gas cooking facilities.<sup>(18)</sup>

However, differences in terms of access to basic amenities by rural and urban residents are not very significant if one examines class based characteristics of a cross-section of households. For example, between two-thirds and one-half of landless and land-poor households (i.e. those with less than 0.5 acres of land) in rural areas live in non-permanent (*kutcha*) types of housing. Conversely, nearly 80 per cent of medium sized landowners (those with between 2.56 and 4.99 acres of land) and 90 per cent of large landowners (those with five acres or more) live in semi-durable or durable structures in rural areas. Similarly, nearly one-half of slum dwellers in Dhaka live in impermanent, or *kutcha*, and semi-permanent structures and 97 per cent of non-slum households live in permanent structures. Whilst nearly 72 per cent of non-slum housing in Dhaka is either of middle or high quality, this holds true for only 11 per cent of housing in the city’s slums with the rest being largely of poor (63 per cent) or very poor (25 per cent) quality.<sup>(19)</sup> Thus, the rural-urban dichotomy exists neither for the poorer masses nor for the richer sections of either area; yet, the gap persists because a majority of rural households are poor and the urban statistics are presented as an absolute category, without taking into consideration the existence of urban slums.

With regard to safe drinking water, nearly 90 per cent of rural households, irrespective of land area ownership, have access to tube well water which, until now, was considered the safest. Now, however, the water is threatened with arsenic pollution in many areas. In urban areas, a similar proportion of slum households have access to tap or tube well water. However, whereas more than four-fifths of the richer households either have their water piped to, or have a tube well inside, their homes, in both rural and urban areas poorer households collect water from a neighbour’s house or from a communal standpipe or tap or tube well. This affects women’s time use patterns and energy levels since they are mostly responsible for water collection and management. The median time needed to collect drinking water is around 30 minutes per trip in the urban slums and, generally,

18. See reference 1; also reference 7, Mitra et al. (1994); and reference 7, Rahman et al. (1996).

19. Thwin, A. A., Islam, M. A., Baqui, A. H., Reinke, W. A. and Black, R. E. (1996), *Health and Demographic Profile of the Urban Population of Bangladesh: An Analysis of Selected Indicators*, special research report, Centre for Health and Population Research, ICDDR,B, Dhaka.

at least two trips are necessary to meet a family's drinking water needs. The situation is comparable for rural women from poorer households and even worse in coastal and hilly regions where obtaining safe drinking water is a big problem.

#### **d. The Role of Transport, Social Services and Social Networks in Rural-Urban Interactions**

Although Bangladesh lags far behind its neighbours and other rapidly urbanizing South-East Asian countries in terms of infrastructural base, the types of quick and cheap modes of transport available and the increasing mobility were unthinkable in the past. For example, there are now three vehicles and nearly three televisions per 1,000 head of population, a near three-fold increase over 1974 levels. People also have hitherto unthinkable access to cheap modes of transport, e.g. buses, *tempos*, etc., and to the mass media, and education and health services are also becoming more widespread although the quality of these services varies significantly. These developments help reduce the gap between rural and urban areas.

In Bangladesh, 97 per cent of secondary schools are privately run, and the role of private bodies and NGOs is increasingly assuming greater importance in universalizing primary education. For example, between 1990 and 1995, the number of mainstream private registered schools increased from 6,266 to 17,151, a 20 per cent average annual increase as compared to a 0.03 per cent increase in the number of government schools for the same period. Moreover, a number of NGOs such as the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), the Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM) and the Centre for Mass Education in Science (CMES) which started innovative non-formal education programmes for children and adolescents enrolled 1.3 million pupils, mainly in rural areas, up to 1995. Evidence suggests that poorer pupils have greater access to both private registered and NGO run schools than to government run schools.<sup>(20)</sup> Micro-level studies show that enrolment is higher among rural poor children than among urban poor children from slum and squatter settlements,<sup>(21)</sup> with nearly one-half of children from landless and two-thirds of children from functionally landless households being enrolled compared to two-fifths of children from urban slum and squatter settlements, in 1996. In addition to the private initiatives, work opportunities created for the illiterate and semi-literate girls and women by the export oriented ready-made garments sector in the mid-1980s can be considered an important reason for the spread of education among poorer households and an equalizing of gender disparity in enrolment rates in rural areas. More than 90 per cent of the garment workers are rural migrants, mostly women (70-75 per cent), a large majority of whom (about 75 per cent) come from mainly landless and land-poor households. Thus, compared to slum women aged 15 and over in Dhaka who, on average, have less than one year's schooling, rural women in garment factories have 2.3 years schooling, even if they belong to landless families.<sup>(22)</sup>

20. Alam, M., Begum, K. and A. Rahman (1997), "Efficiency of primary education in Bangladesh" in Jalaluddin A.K., Chowdhury, A. and R. Mushtaque (editors) (1997), *Getting Started: Universalising Quality Primary Education in Bangladesh*, incorporating the report on the Conference on Universal Primary Education in Bangladesh, Dhaka and Rajendrapur, 6-10 August, 1996, University Press Limited, Dhaka.

21. Afsar, R. (1996), "Application of demographic techniques in the analysis of gender biased urban poverty situation in Bangladesh", paper presented at the Australian National Population Association, Adelaide, Australia, December 2-6, 1996; also reference 7,

Rahman et al. (1996). The author's on-going survey of slum and non-slum households in Dhaka shows that enrolment at primary level for slum children (6-10 years old) is now similar to that for children in rural areas (nearly 70 per cent). However, among the adult population (16+), illiteracy is highest in slum and squatter settlements, where 47 and 66 per cent of adult men and women, respectively, are illiterate compared to 34 and 55 per cent, respectively, of their counterparts in rural areas. For details, see Afsar (forthcoming, 1999), "Is migration transferring rural poverty to urban areas?" in Rahman, H.Z. (editor) (forthcoming, 1999), *Bangladesh: Poverty Dynamics in the 90s*, University Press Limited, Dhaka.

22. Afsar, R. (1998a), "Working and living conditions of the garment factory workers in Bangladesh and health hazards with special focus on the threat of STD/AIDS/HIV: a case study on the role of NGO intervention", mimeo, Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, Dhaka; also Afsar, R. (1998b), "A case study of the gender dimension of labour migration in the formal manufacturing sector of Dhaka city", paper prepared for Centre for Policy Dialogue and United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (CPD-UNRISD) Project on Women's Employment in Bangladesh.

23. See reference 1; also Majumdar, P., Mahmud, S. and R. Afsar (1995), *Squatters of Dhaka: Dynamism in the Life of Agargoan Squatters*, University Press Limited, Dhaka.

24. See reference 22, Afsar (1998b).

25. See reference 22, Afsar (1998b).

26. See reference 7, Rahman et al. (1996).

27. See reference 7, Rahman et al. (1996).

As a result, although previously three-quarters of migrants arriving in Dhaka with somewhere to stay took less than a month to find work,<sup>(23)</sup> increasingly they migrate with specific job related information.<sup>(24)</sup> In a study of the formal manufacturing sector, more than one-third of the workers migrated for their present job and nearly two-thirds of migrant workers had a direct connection with an employer's agent prior to migration.<sup>(25)</sup>

The above analysis shows that an informal face-to-face communication system and culture has become more widespread whilst retaining a personal touch. Over time, new demands are generated by market forces at the international, national and local levels. The balance between demand and supply is mediated by the flow of information and the intensity of social networks, transportation levels, physical and social infrastructure and responses from government, individuals and corporate bodies and families. Mediation at the family level depends on gender and the age composition of members, on the level of resources, more particularly, land controlled by the family, and on the intensity of social support both within and outside the village.

### III. POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

**FINDINGS PRESENTED IN** this paper challenge the conventional wisdom of the rural-urban dichotomy theory and illustrate the importance of an integrated analysis of socio-cultural, technological, economic and political factors, and of the inter-relationships at family, local, national and global levels in understanding the actual stratification.

The paper further indicates that the consistent emphasis on rural development and poverty alleviation by the government could not provide a cushion against deprivation for the extreme poor nor minimize the risks of income erosion of the moderately poor and some sectors of the non-poor (marginal and small landholders);<sup>(26)</sup> the policy also failed to arrest out-migration from rural areas. Based on panel data, Rahman et al. found that between 1988 and 1995, 14 per cent of all households in their study villages migrated.<sup>(27)</sup> Three-quarters of the migrant households belonged to the landless category (owning up to 0.5 acres) and the land-poor (up to one acre). The incidence of migration of the entire household was low among land-owning households.

This suggests that migration is adopted as a self-help strategy for poverty alleviation and income maximization by these families in rural areas. Rapid expansion in the cheaper modes of transportation and improvements in road infrastructure not only facilitate rural-urban interactions but, along with construction, formal export oriented manufacturing and traditional types of services generate greater employment opportunities for the poorer people. In rural areas, they responded to the emerging opportunities by sending young and adult working men and women to areas of economic opportunity. By providing necessary information, shelter and other help, family members, rela-

28. See reference 22, Afsar (1998b).

29. See reference 21, Afsar (forthcoming, 1999).

tives, friends, neighbours and acquaintances from the same district facilitate migration by increasing an individual's coping capacity to relocate.<sup>(28)</sup> This suggests that, wherever there is economic opportunity, people will make every effort to avail themselves of it. Therefore, along with the promotion of economic development in rural areas, a balanced development strategy should be adopted in order to encourage settlement in small and intermediate cities and, at the same time, improve employment and living conditions in large cities. A sound population distribution strategy demands a concerted effort to combine the development of both agricultural and non-agricultural activities, and infrastructure development such as roads and inland water transport, rural electrification, communications, storage facilities in rural areas, the development of market towns as commercial, industrial and services centres, the promotion of inter-linkages between rural non-farm and urban sectors, whilst at the same time ensuring effective urban management.

This paper shows that, although migrant poor in cities gain greater employment and cash-earning opportunities, they face intense competition and scarcity in meeting their basic needs. Thus, despite economic growth, although the incidence of poverty in urban areas is lower than that in the country as a whole, the risks of health hazards and environmental pollution are greater in urban than in rural areas. In her on-going study of slum and non-slum households, Afsar found that overall morbidity rate, defined as the proportion of sick members during the month preceding the survey to total household members, was higher than in rural areas.<sup>(29)</sup> The very high incidence of fever and coughs among sick members suggests higher levels of environmental pollution in urban areas than in rural areas. Moreover, children under the age of five, ageing and slum populations are found to be more susceptible to health hazards than other categories. As indicated in Section II, the industrial and modern services sectors that contribute to economic growth and urban transformation have not registered much change since Independence. Simultaneously, there have been serious loopholes in the distribution process and the management of economic gains so far. Without the active implementation of direct anti-poverty programmes to benefit the poor and vulnerable sections of urban and rural populations, the pattern of economic development will remain lopsided. By providing a decent living environment and by increasing access by the urban poor to social services essential for health, the city authorities can play an effective role in urban poverty alleviation.

However, the concern is not only with health and environmental hazards in urban poor agglomerations but also with whether rural-urban migration transfers rural poverty to urban areas or provides scope for consolidating income gains and a graduation from poverty. Unemployment among migrants is lower at their place of destination (4 per cent) than in their pre-migration rural areas where 13 per cent were unemployed. Moreover, recent and poorer migrants have much lower rates of unemployment (3 and 8 per cent, respectively) than their long-term and non-migrant counterparts (6 and 11 per cent, respec-

30. See reference 1.

31. See reference 1.

tively) from both slum and non-slum areas of Dhaka.<sup>(30)</sup> The author's on-going study on slum and non-slum households of Dhaka also reveals that, with longer stays, nearly two-thirds of migrant heads from slum and squatter households acquire skills and support from social networks which allow them to enter the skilled construction and manufacturing sectors, run small businesses and rent shops, own rickshaws and other assets, and build houses. Interestingly, a dominant majority were landless or owned less than 0.5 acres of land and 42 per cent were employed as agricultural labourers prior to migration. Also, existing evidence suggests that, with longer stays in Dhaka, slum dwellers tend to invest more than their recent migrant counterparts in nutritious food and children's education.<sup>(31)</sup>

However, in the absence of basic social services and well-targeted development programmes, urban poor households are under the potential threat of income erosion as a result of crises such as eviction, cheating by business partners, prolonged sickness and loss of productivity, threat of disability, recurrent expenditure on medication, extortion, marital instability and sexual harassment in the case of women. This calls for positive intervention on the part of government, NGOs and the private sector to enhance productivity and income levels of the urban poor with the help of education, the development of skills, and the provision of health, water, sanitation and other basic social services. The objectives of these promotional and interventionist policy measures should be to strengthen the coping capacities of the poorer populations in both rural and urban areas and to minimize the risks that increase their insecurity and vulnerability. Measures to improve efficiency in the delivery of basic social services (including education and health care) include the elimination of subsidies, the re-direction of public expenditure and services from rich to poor households, and a strengthening of the resource base, capacity and authority of local government institutions. On the other hand, family-level risk minimization strategies of the extreme poor populations should be directly aided by government and NGOs as measures of effective poverty alleviation both in rural and urban areas.

In this context of increasing interaction between rural and urban areas, there is little scope for considering migration as a one-off permanent event with negative implications for economic and social development. On the contrary, existing literature shows that it is a flexible and dynamic phenomenon that can occur once or several times, or even continuously involve two or more geographic locations.<sup>(32)</sup> The term migration encompasses diverse forms of territorial mobility involving a wide spectrum of movement ranging from commuting, to temporary absence from home place for a couple of days to as much as several years or even the whole working life, to seasonal migration or permanent migration. For example, in assessing causes and consequences of rural-urban migration in 1991-92, the author had to conduct a supplementary census of boarding houses in Dhaka to cover temporary migrants who had not been adequately represented in the 1989 electoral roll (which had served as the sampling frame for the study). Whilst conducting a re-survey,

32. See reference 1; also Chapman, M. and R.M. Prothero (1985), "Themes on circulation in the Third World" in Prothero, R.M. and M. Chapman (editors) (1985), *Circulation in Third World Countries*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, England; and Hugo, G.J. (1980), "New conceptual approaches to migration in the context of urbanization" in Jones, G.W. and H.V. Richter (editors) (1980), *Population Mobility and*

*Development: South-East Asia and the Pacific*, monograph No.27, Development Studies Centre, Australian National University.

33. This does not include households that receive remittances or have members who have migrated to other countries. If those households are included, the number of non-permanent migrant households would increase to nearly 20-25 per cent.

nearly 10 per cent of households were found to be mainly temporary migrants, with some commuting between two or three major cities. Bi- and multi-locality households are also apparent in some cases, where one part of the household (e.g. wife and children) lives in Dhaka and the other (e.g. husband) in another district town or metropolitan city or even abroad, to maximize income and benefits from diverse economic opportunities.<sup>(33)</sup> The diversity of migration types calls for improved sources of data and precludes any simple, uniform and universal relationship between migration and other processes of social change and development. Increased levels of personal mobility as a result of greater rural-urban interaction has opened up opportunities for a broader range of socio-economic and ethnic groups. Hence, the importance of non-permanent movements in the process of rural-urban convergence cannot be ignored in the formulation of balanced spatial distribution policies.

Finally, institutions, groups and individuals, policies and practices that are involved in or facilitate rent-seeking and extortion should be dealt with ruthlessly. The sudden rise and subsequent dramatic fall of the "Asian Tigers" amply demonstrated that institutionalized corruption cannot sustain economic growth in the long run. Therefore, it is high time to impose the rule of law against all kinds of violence, lawlessness and corruption. Extortionists, criminals and wrong-doers should be punished, irrespective of their strength of patronage, financial solvency, power base or position. To accelerate and sustain the growth process, markets should be allowed to function without monopoly to ensure free and fair competition, and the state should ensure basic conditions for such competition by making the system decentralized, accountable and transparent. The state should also protect the interests of the extremely poor and highly vulnerable sections of the population, who have demonstrated their willingness to fight against the odds, so that they do not get trapped in the vicious cycle of poverty.