«I lifted an anchor by coming here»

An analysis of how gender influences perceived options for adaptive migration in a Bangladeshi community

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Abstract:

In view of rising climate change, migration is increasingly perceived as a potential adaptation strategy to more intense and frequent environmental stressors. When investigating situations of environmental stress, gender analyzes tend to focus on how women are more vulnerable than men, and are inclined to portray women as victimized and passive, trapped in unfavorable social structures of female seclusion. While not questioning the findings of such research, it may have caused a blindness to female agency, causing women to be overlooked as active agents in environmental migration literature. This study shows that women do migrate when environmental stressors impoverish the livelihoods of their household. Aiming to investigate how and why this happens, the study is guided by the question of how gender influences the process of migration, and further what implications such influences have on the potential for utilization and efficiency of migration as an adaptation strategy to environmental stressors. Employing an analytical framework which focuses on how individuals perceive their potential responses to threatened livelihoods, the study explores how gendered drivers of economic incentives and cultural constraints are negotiated at the individual and household level. Qualitative fieldwork from a Dhaka slum and three villages in Southern Bangladesh’s Bhola district revealed that women utilize the option to migrate when they perceive it as most likely that their male guardian will not be able to provide for the household when environmental stressors threaten livelihoods. Creating great social costs, perceptions of appropriate gender roles negatively effect the utilization and efficiency of female migration as an adaptive response to environmental stressors. This should not lead to dismissal of active female migration in the context of environmental stress, however. Rather, because women are often found to be more vulnerable to environmental stressors than men, it is important that the role and status of women in migration processes is addressed for a better understanding of how their adaptive potential can be enhanced.
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Section 1

Literature, methods, and conceptual tools
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Purpose and research question

In view of the rising impact of climate change, migration is increasingly perceived as a potential adaptation strategy to more intense and frequent environmental stressors. Gender roles are thought to be «perhaps one of, if not the single most important factor shaping the migratory experience» (IOM, *Gender & Migration*). Since women are often found to be more vulnerable to environmental stressors than men, it is important that the role and status of women in environment-driven migration processes are included and addressed in research and policy-making (IOM, 2009). This study aims to analyze gender roles in this context, guided by the following research question:

*How does gender influence the process of migration, and the utilization and efficiency of migration as an adaptation strategy to environmental stressors?*

Women are predominantly mentioned within disaster literature, emphasizing how they are more vulnerable than men in times of environmental-induced distress. This is often explained by referencing existing gender inequalities, especially concerning less developed countries where women are more tightly bound to the home than men and thus excluded from important information available only in public arenas. This notion of women as homebound somewhat contradicts the idea of independently migrating women, and allows for a partial explanation of why women are not viewed as significant actors within the environmental-migration nexus. While acknowledging that female migration flows may be marginal compared to male migration numbers, this study argues that the notion of women as more vulnerable may be victimizing and thus mistakenly characterize women as more passive than is reality.

In Bangladesh, the establishment of the ready-made garments industry (RMGs) has opened new opportunities for female employment in a country where women and wage work is highly contested. Data shows that large shares of women in this industry are migrants, often from disaster-prone areas, which may indicate that women migrate when environmental stressors threaten the livelihood of their household. As a country characterized by movement, frequent environmental stressors, and patriarchal gender norms, Bangladesh was chosen for the case study.
Based on qualitative fieldwork from a Dhaka slum and three villages in Southern Bangladesh’s Bhola district, this study not only confirms that women migrate when environmental stressors affect their households’ livelihoods, but also that they exercise agency in migration decisions when migrating with or without their households. Nonetheless, female migration seems to be a response to dire situations, indicating higher vulnerability among households with more female members, as women seem to wait longer than men to migrate. This may result in migratory decisions that are less planned and more forced. Furthermore, female migration for diversification of livelihoods seems to be less sustainable than male migration because independently migrating women are typically unmarried, implying that remittance flows will cease upon their marriage.

The following analysis shows that gender norms create cultural constraints that must be mediated against economic incentives, the latter also being deeply gendered. Accordingly, gender poses different incentives and constraints for men and women. This influences the process of migration from southern Bangladesh to Dhaka, affecting individuals’ ability to efficiently use migration as an adaptation strategy in response to environmental stressors. If women do migrate as a response to environmental stressors, more circumstantial understanding is needed to better facilitate such migration in the future. It is arguable that precisely because fewer women migrate, greater focus should be given to those who do, because they may face more migration challenges that increase the potential of suboptimal outcomes. Importantly, the term gender in this study should not to be understood as another word for ‘women’. Gender roles are relational; thus, a comparison of female and male perspectives is needed to fully understand the situation of either group. However, because women are largely missing from environmental migration literature, they are the main focus of this study, with their situation evaluated from both the male and female perspective.

The paper is structured as follows: Chapter 2 provides a review of existing literature and debates within the fields of female migration; gender and climate change; environmental migration; and the structure versus agency debate, identifying where research gaps exists. Chapter 3 lays out the conceptual framework for the study, while Chapter 4 gives an account of the research strategy, research process and methods used. Moving to findings and analysis, Chapter 5 describes the relevant context in which the study takes place, before Chapter 6 provides a more thorough analysis of gendered opportunities and constraints. Chapter 7 looks at the negotiations between these aforementioned opportunities and constraints at the individual and household level. Concerning the community in question, Chapter 8 discusses the implications such gendered findings may have on
the utilization of migration as an effective adaptation strategy to environmental stressors. A short account of potential policy implications is provided in Chapter 9 before the threads are strung together in conclusion.
Chapter 2: Literary review

This chapter reviews literature within the fields of female migration, gender and climate change, and environmental migration. In mainstream migration literature, women are increasingly recognized as not only passive followers, but also active agents in migration processes. However, this has been acknowledged to a lesser extent within environmental literature, perhaps due to increasing focus on the disproportionate vulnerability of women to the effects of climate change. It is here argued that the linkage between female migration and environmental stressors is lacking. Both the female agency identified in migration literature and the gendered vulnerabilities highlighted in disaster and hazard literature should be incorporated into environmental migration literature.

2.1. Female migration

Female migrants were long portrayed as largely passive, migrating mainly for the purposes of marriage or family reunification. Challenging this narrative, research conducted from the late 1970s to early 90s showed that women were as likely as men to migrate to the United States, even outnumbering men in some periods (see for example, Pedraza, 1991; Chant, 1992). These findings set-off a series of female migration studies throughout the eighties and nineties. Importantly, these studies put forward the argument that women «were both independent economic actors» as well as «dependent family members in the migration process» (Curran et al., 2006, p. 200). This changed the perception of women as exclusively passive in the migration process and pushed for women to be included as active agents in migration research for a more holistic understanding.

It is now established that from 1960 onward, women have constituted almost half of the world’s international migration flows, with no continent carrying less than 44 per cent female migrants (Zlotnik, 2003). The literature recognizes that «while many women accompany or join family members, increasing numbers of female migrants migrate on their own» (Martin, 2003, p. 4), moving «for a variety of reasons, of which marriage is only one and among which work is becoming increasingly significant» (Gosh, 2009, p. 8). While the majority of female migration studies focus on international migration, studies also acknowledge that «female internal migration for employment purposes appears to be on the increase» (Martin, 2003, see also Deshingar, 2005; Tacoli & Mabala, 2010).
The rise in female migration is believed to be a result of two factors: 1) greater acceptance for women moving for wage work and 2) the establishment of gendered labor markets, exemplified by export-oriented labor-intensive industries (Jolly and Reeves, 2005, p. 7) and domestic work at home and abroad. The two factors are interlinked, as increased opportunities and incentives to move are likely to lead more women to do so. This increase in movement subsequently pushes for greater acceptance of work-related female migration as the phenomenon gradually becomes normalized (Deshingar, 2005, p. 12).

Unsurprisingly, the majority of studies investigating female migration have focused on countries where female migration is substantial. For example, data is readily available through the Mexican Migration Project (MMP) on internal migration as well as between Mexico and the rest of North America. In Asia, much attention has been given to the Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia, where women are estimated to constitute between 60-80% of international migration flows (Omelaniuk, 2006, p. 2), indicating a large share of independently migrating women.

Concerning South-Asia, literature on independently migrating women is scarce, which can be explained by lower numbers of female migration in this region. This low number of female migrants is related to norms of appropriate behavior for men and women, which contests the concept of working women. However, it must be noted that numbers from this region are scarce. Thus, «the estimated levels presented ... may not accurately reflect the changes taking place in the share of female migration in the region» (Zlotnik, 2003). Despite this dearth of quantitative data, from the 1980-90s onward there has been an emergence of studies focusing on internal female labor migration in South-Asia (Deshingar, 2005; Sundari, 2005; IOM, 2009; Mazumadar & Argihotri, 2014). These studies have shown that: «autonomous migration by women for employment ... is a phenomenon that can no longer be ignored» (ibid., p. 146).

In the case of Bangladesh, several studies (Afsar, 2002; Kabeer, 1991; Huq, 1995) show there has been a substantial increase in female migration from rural to urban areas for work in typically feminine occupations. This trend is especially visible after the establishment of the Ready Made Garments industry in the early 1980s, which will be further discussed in Chapter 4. Although still numerically low, the international migration of women from Bangladesh is on the rise. This may also indicate an increase in internal migration, as internal migration often precedes international movement (Afsar, 2003; Deshingar, 2005).
The growth of export-oriented manufacturing has led to the expansion of employment opportunities for unskilled women in metropolitan cities of Southeast Asia, and Bangladesh is no exception (Afsar, 2002, p. 108).

The establishment of women as active agents in migration flows has shifted the focus within this branch of migration studies from exclusively on women to more broadly on gender. This shift came with the acknowledgment that gender not only influences who migrate, but also how men and women experience migration respectively. If relational, such experiences can hardly be understood by focusing on only one of the sexes. Lutz (2010, p. 1649-1650) describes this academic development in four phases. First, there was a compensatory approach aimed at making women visible in migration flows. Then, focus shifted toward women’s specific roles and contributions in migration processes. Third, focus changed to power inequalities as a means to explain different migration patterns and outcomes. Finally, the emphasis changed from women to gender. This last approach aimed at showing how gender is different from biological sex, which means it should be understood as contextualized in social processes, working simultaneously as a process and a product. Such a shift from women to gender also signalized a shift from stereotypes to social constructs. Rather than being externally ascribed, gender became increasingly understood as internalized and performed by the individuals in question.

2.2. Gendered vulnerability and environmental migration

It is predicted that an important consequence of changing climate will be an increase in human mobility, as some areas will become less habitable over time. To better understand and prepare for such movements, there has been a renewed interest in the relationship between environment and migration (Hunter, 2005). Subsequently, it has been voiced that rather than exclusively being perceived as a failure to adapt, migration in response to environmental stressors should be understood as a potential adaptation strategy. It has thus been argued that when migration has the potential for contributing to adaptation, it should be facilitated. (Talcoli, 2009; Barnett & Webber, 2010; Walshan, 2010; Black et al., 2011; Foresight, 2011; Renaud et al., 2011).

It is surprising that the potential linkage between female migrants and environmental stressors have not been explored to a larger degree. Although often mentioned, the topic is rarely investigated. Chindarkar (2012, p. 2) states how «one aspect of gender and climate change that remains a huge gap and requires attention is that of climate change-induced migration». This missing link is
especially prominent in the context of South-Asia, an area highly prone to climate change and environmental stress—factors believed to significantly increase human mobility in this area over the next decades.

A partial explanation for the lacking focus on women in environmental migration literature can be found in literature on gender and climate change. In response to critiques of gender neutrality in climate change discourse, much research has been conducted on gender and climate change. This is particularly evident in disaster and hazard literature in which the vulnerability of women is often compared to that of men with disheartening results (see for example Cannon, 2002). Such studies have established that women are more vulnerable to environmental stress because of their subordinate status at home and in society at large (Ikeda, 1995; Fothergill, 1996; Nelson et al., 2002; Ahmed & Fabjer, 2009; Björnberg & Hansson, 2013). This vulnerability is linked to their «high levels of pre-disaster poverty» (Nelson et al., 2002, p. 54), and «gender inequality, social roles, especially as caregiver, and a lack of mobility» (Fothergill, 1996, p. 34).

Such disproportionate vulnerabilities of women has been shown to be prominent in South-Asia. Women’s subordinate role give them less access to resources. Thus, poverty - a main source of vulnerability in developing countries - has been shown to affect women disproportionately (Cannon, 2002, p. 47). Such circumstances often leave them weak from under-nutrition. Combined with the reality that many women are never taught how to swim, and the heavy and inflexible clothing they wear, makes women more vulnerable when disasters hit. Furthermore, because women are responsible for taking care of the home and children, they often stay home when dangerous weather hits rather than seek proper shelter (ibid., p. 48). It has also been proposed that women delay seeking shelter because of their hesitance to interact with unknown men outside the home. The exclusion of women from public places also denies them potentially critical information (Jungehülsing, 2010, p. 18). Such inequalities ultimately lead to higher mortality rates for women in disaster situations, a striking example being the 2004 tsunami where nearly 80 per cent of victims in certain areas of India were women (Ndiaye, 2008).

Although of crucial importance, this focus on the vulnerability of women in disasters may have led to a victimization of women, where research «has focused primarily on ‘adding women’ as a discriminated and vulnerable group» (Jolly and Reeves, 2005, p. 2), causing a blindness to the potential of female agency. Because migration theory presumes agency on behalf of the migrant,
women have largely been left out of environmental migration literature, as disaster literature tends to portray them as lacking such agency. However, as has been argued: «it is not correct to view women only as helpless, fragile victims» (Ikeda, 1995, p.189), as such a deterministic view on women fails to capture the whole story and causes «the persistence of negative stereotypes [that] made it appear that women did little worth writing about» (Pedraza, 1991, p. 304). In line with the narrative of passive women, gendered migration research concerning climate change impacts has thus far focused on situations where the husband migrates and the wife stays behind, leaving her to face increased hardships because of the absence of a male guardian. There are hence few studies on women as migrants (Boyd & Grieco, 2003).

Importantly, there seems to be a growing awareness of this gap, and several studies have now also been conducted focusing on independently migrating women in contexts of environmental migration. Jungehülsing (2010) shows that although more vulnerable because of societal disadvantages, Mexican women migrate in search of work. This finding breaks with the conventional narrative of women migrating purely for family reunification and shows that environmental stressors accelerate migration. According to Jungehülsing’s study, migration of young, unmarried women is particularly on the rise, as this is more socially accepted than the independent migration of married women. Similarly, Tacoli and Mabala (2010) note how young women are increasingly migrating independently in Mali, Nigeria, Tanzania and Vietnam. These trends are explained by increased income opportunities in urban areas due to gendered labor markets, as well as increased constraints on resources in home communities. Sundari (2005) noted the same trend of increasing numbers of young women migrating internally in India, explaining this through the linkage of new income opportunities in export-oriented industries in combination with drought in the home communities.

2.3. The structure versus agency debate

Mirroring an enduring disagreement in the wider social sciences, the debate over structure and agency has been argued to be of particular importance to migration theory (Bakewell, 2010). While it is a central assumption within the social sciences that human behavior is influenced by social phenomena, there is still disagreement about how such social phenomena are created and how and to what extent they influence human behavior. While a realist approach sees social phenomena as entities with inherent properties existing independently of human agents, constructionists see social
phenomena as socially constructed through human interaction, and thus incapable of possessing such inherent properties.

Perceptions about social phenomena will influence the focus of analysis. On the one hand, constructionists tend to focus on social interactions at the micro-level, arguing that in order to understand human behavior, and how social phenomena are created, one has to start with the individual. Ultimately, it is individuals who make decisions and carry out actions. On the other hand, structuralists argue that individual action is never carried out in a vacuum, and therefore must be understood within the social context in which they are acted out: «While actions are a function of interest, the ability to choose is patterned by the social structure» (Risman, 2004, p. 432).

The agency of the migrant is at the core of how the migration process, as well as policy responses to such movements, is understood and formulated. Agency can be defined as «the capacity for social actors to reflect on their position, devise strategies and take action to achieve their desires» (Bakewell, 2010, p. 6), and is closely related to the issue of voluntary versus forced migration debate within the field of human movement. Migration theory presumes that the migrant has a high level of agency concerning his or her own movement, while the opposite is true for a displaced individual, who is defined by being forced to move. Bakewell argues that this conceptual divide between forced and voluntary movement has left discussions of agency and structure out of migration literature in spite of its relevance (ibid., p. 2). Consequently, studies tend to focus either on voluntary movement with a presumption of a relatively high level of agency, or on forced movement leaving the individual with little or no agency. However, it has been increasingly acknowledged that this divide between forced and voluntary migration is unable to capture the full array of migration decisions, and should rather be understood as a sliding scale rather than two mutually exclusive categories. The question then changes from whether or, to degrees of agency, calling for theories that allow to for both constraints and opportunities.

Kabeer makes a similar point (1991) in her study of female garment workers in Dhaka. She shows that while a structuralist approach focusing on cultural norms can offer much in explaining barriers to work force entry, it often portrays such barriers as inflexible, making it difficult to explain what causes women to act contrary to such norms. On the other hand, individualistic approaches may tend toward economic cost-benefit analyzes. Focusing on outcomes, such studies are at risk of overlooking the process of choice and potential non-economic factors that influence the final
decision and create conflicts in the decision-making process. In other words, rational choice theory may fail to include potential social barriers to the economically most ‘rational’ choice, and:

The possibility that some decisions may entail more pain, costs or effort than others - if, for instance they require ... confronting previously unchallenged cultural constraints. [This] is trivialized within rational choice analysis (Kabeer, 1991, p.138).

The debate over structure and agency remains unresolved. However, it is becoming more widely acknowledged that both agency at the individual level as well as more wide-ranging social structures need to be taken into account to understand human behavior. Indeed, human agents do not act in a vacuum. At the same time, predictions about human behavior have proved to be difficult, as different actors may deal with social structures differently. It is important to remember that multiple sets of social structures exist. If feeling constrained by one social structure, an agent may draw on justification for his or her actions from a different structure. Such utilization of different sets of social structures can provide more agency than initially evident. Therefore, it can be argued that a potential arena for individual agency is the negotiation of different choices (Kabeer, 1991, p. 139).

The structure-agency debate can provide one potential reason for the gap, or decoupling, between female migration research and studies on gender and climate change. Based on different points of departure, female migration research has moved toward an increased focus on the agency of individual female migrants. Vulnerability literature, on the other hand, focuses more on the cultural constraints, or structures, that render women more vulnerable. This is not to say that either field excludes other perspectives, but it serves as a reminder that having different points of departure does not mean that the findings of the two fields are mutually exclusive.

2.4. Importance

Although first mentioned in the 1970s, the field of environmental migration is relatively new, only developing as a distinct field in the early 2000s (Renaud et al., 2007, p. 11). Given its youth and cross-disciplinary dynamics, it cannot be expected that all topics related to the broad academic umbrella of environmental migration have been covered. The interdisciplinary of the field further cause it difficult to map out what has been covered in literature, as environmental factors may have been factored in without being explicitly stated. Although such difficulties may have caused some
information to be lost in the review process, it should be noted that actively migrating women are largely ignored within environmental migration literature.

First, if women do migrate as a response to environmental stressors, more information is needed on under what circumstances they do so, as failure to acknowledge this group of environmental migrants may cause the research community to miss the full array of adaptive measure undertaken. The fact that women are migrating in lower numbers than men does not qualify as an argument to dismiss this group as unimportant. Rather, that only a few women migrate calls for an increased focus on the women who do, as these women are likely to be more vulnerable than their male counterparts. In thought of female vulnerabilities highlighted in disaster literature, it can be expected that female migrants face different and perhaps greater challenges than men throughout the migration process. Thus, female migration may result in outcomes different to male migration that affect how successful migration is for adaptation.

Gender is a cross-cutting issue and perhaps one of, if not the single most important factor shaping the migratory experience ... relevant to most, if not all, aspects of migration. (IOM, 2009, p. 9).

Such aspects of migration include who migrates, why they do so, how the decision to migrate is taken, and how migrants experience migration (Jolly and Reeves, 2005: 9). As highlighted by Pedraza: «Ultimately, the demographic composition of migration flows is important not only because its causes are various but also because of its consequences» (Pedraza, 1991, p. 312). In a best-outcome scenario, migration functions as an adaptive measure rather than a failure to do so. Thus, a better understanding of the ability of women to use migration as an adaption strategy, in comparison to men, is needed (Jungehülsing, 2010, p. 20).

However, there currently seems to be a decoupling between literature focusing on internal labor migration, gendered vulnerabilities in the situation of disasters, and environmental migration. This study, in line with the studies by Tacoli and Mabala (2010) and Jungehülsing (2010), attempts to help bridge this gap. It does so by analyzing the impact of gender on migration flows from a rural sending community highly prone to environmental stressors and loss of livelihoods, to an area of Dhaka with a deeply gendered labor market.
Chapter 3: Conceptual framework

Having argued above that more investigation is needed on how gender influences migration processes in contexts where migration can be important for adaptation to environmental stressors, the next step is to identify theories that may help shed light on this issue. This chapter will present the analytical tools utilized to help answer the research question.

First, the question of how to understand the relationship between environmental stressors and human mobility is answered with the help of a livelihood approach, which captures the effect of environmental factors within a larger set of migration drivers. Then, the concepts of vulnerability and adaptation are discussed with a linkage back to livelihoods, before discussing under what circumstances migration can be an adaptation strategy. Importantly, migration may involve both opportunities and challenges. Both dimensions need to be investigated to gain an understanding of how and whether migration can be facilitated as an adaptation strategy as opposed to a failure to adapt. Gender is expected to function as a determinant for opportunities and challenges throughout the migration process for individuals and the households to which they belong. Hence, a framework is sought that allows for both constraints and opportunities and structure and agency. The socio-cognitive framework of Grothmann and Patt (2005) is appropriate for this task because it takes into account both external and internal factors that may influence an individual’s adaptation decision, capturing perceptions and negotiations between different options.

3.1. The link between environmental stressors and human mobility

«There is widespread acceptance that climate change is occurring» (Foresight, 2011, p. 26). It is furthermore predicted that an important consequence of changing climate will be an increase in human mobility, as some areas will become less habitable over time. The relationship between environmental factors and human mobility is however not sufficiently understood, which leaves little consensus as to whether environmental migration should be perceived as a category of its own, or grouped with other forms of migration. One of the reasons for this lack of consensus is that the topic is approached from different disciplines. Environmental scientists, the humanitarian community, and migration experts all emphasize different aspects of the issue. Concerned with potential conflicts and humanitarian consequences, alarmists have predicted large waves of human movements. On the other hand, skeptics dismiss environmental migration as nothing new, arguing that human mobility patterns have always been closely connected to weather and livelihoods. What
is new, however, is the onset of climate change. Although it is itself a contested phenomenon, consensus is approaching that climate change is happening and will have consequences.

A further problem with the concept of environmental migration is that no direct link can be made between the onset of an environmentally damaging event and climate change. One way to understand the relationship between climate change and environmental damage is, however, to recognize that such a direct link is not necessary. Rather, climate change is thought to increase stressors already latent in the system in question. For example, areas prone to drought will become even drier, monsoons season will become heavier, and cyclones will become more intense and frequent. Thus, the argument for focusing on environmental stressors still stands (Renaud et al., 2010).

If one accepts such a relationship between climate change and environment, the next step is to address the relationships between different drivers of migration, and how environmental drivers fit into this picture. Migration is a complex phenomenon, and few migrants would move for one reason alone. This insight is not new, but is increasingly considered in environmental migration theory. The inclusion of multiple drivers for migration alongside environmental factors brings such theory closer to reality, but complicates the notion of environmental migration as a separate category. This creates a problem of distinguishing environmental migrants from other groups of migrants, except from at the more extreme end of the continuum. However, limiting environmental migrants to those displaced by a natural disaster fails to take into account environmental influences on migration before this extreme threshold is reached. Such a categorization only allows for inclusion of reactive responses, ignoring potential proactive adaptive measures. In short, it fails both to acknowledge slow onset processes of environmental stressors, as well as anticipatory actions to deal with these. However, Bardsley and Hugo (2010) point out to how:

Migration is often less a function of immediate stress resulting from the onset of a natural disaster than a proactive diversification strategy taken in anticipation of such events in the future, or to cope with long-term declines in livelihood (Bardsley & Hugo, 2010, p. 239).

**3.2. A livelihood approach**

How then, to deal with the issue of environmental drivers’ relationship to other drivers of migration? It has been argued that increasing inclusion of other socio-economic factors in
environmental migration research may make the term ‘environmental migrant’ even more vague than it already is. This risks overlooking the great influence that environment has on socio-economic well-being in the first place. (Bardsley & Hugo, 2010). Such influence may be of particular relevance concerning the rural poor, often though to be the most prone to climate change impacts. To overcome this problem, a livelihood approach will be used as an entry point for a better understanding of the link between societal factors and environment. A livelihood is defined as the «capabilities, assets, income and activities required to secure the necessities of life» (IFRC, «What is a Livelihood?»). The concept of livelihoods:

...attempts to capture not just what people do in order to make a living, but the resources that provide them with the capability to build a satisfactory living, the risk factors that they must consider in managing their resources, and the institutional and policy context that either helps or hinders them in their pursuit of a viable or improving living (Ellis, 2003, p. 3).

In other words, a livelihood approach can help contextualize how different drivers of migration are linked, and to highlight how livelihood and environmental factors are integrated in a wider social system which will exercise influence on final outcomes.

3.3. Vulnerability and adaptation

The threat to livelihoods by environmental damage is captured by the concept of vulnerability, which have by some been equated with «the ability to maintain a livelihood» (Renaud et al. 2010, p. 16). An early definition of the concept simply describes it as defenselessness to environmental stressors (Chambers, [1989] 2006, p. 33). Building on this notion, the concept of vulnerability has more recently been theorized as a reflection of three closely interrelated components: a system’s or an individual’s level of exposure, sensitivity, and adaptive capacity. Exposure and sensitivity refer to frequency, intensity, and impact of environmental stressors, while adaptive capacity refer to the ability to respond to and overcome the challenges caused by these (Smit & Wandel, 2006, p. 286).

Vulnerability in the context of climate change is important because it is widely understood that climate change will have a greater impact on vulnerable areas, endangering the livelihoods of people living such places. First, climate change is predicted to affect areas of the world where many least developed counties are located. Moreover, the fact that these countries are less developed makes their populations more vulnerable to changes in the environment, as inhabitants’ livelihoods tend to be directly dependent on natural resources in close proximity to where they live. Lastly, people living in rural areas of these regions tend to be the poorest segment of society, with little or
no buffer to fluctuations in their income base. Consequently, the poorest segment of the population in the least developed countries are often the ones most prone to environmental stressors (Adger, 2006, p. 270).

A closely linked concept is that of adaptation, or actions taken to respond to challenges posed by environmental stressors. This concept seeks to answer the question of what communities and individuals can do to overcome such challenges. Vulnerability and adaptation are bridged through the idea of adaptive capacity: «adaptations are manifestations of adaptive capacity, and they represent ways of reducing vulnerability» (Smit & Wandel, 2005, p. 286), where increased vulnerability will be negatively linked with the ability to adapt. Thus, vulnerability influences the context in which adaptation takes place.

### 3.4. Migration as an adaptation strategy

In light of the concepts of vulnerability and adaptation, the question arises whether migration should be seen as an adaptation strategy when environmental stressors threaten livelihoods. Migration for environmental reasons is thought to happen mainly from areas that are more vulnerable, which has led this type of migration to be associated with marginalized population groups, casting «displacement in a negative light, with many millions of people forced to move, and tension and conflict the result» (Black et al., 2011). Such a narrative portrays migration as a last resort-measure and thus a failure to adapt.

However, migration in response to environmental stress can also be understood as something to be supported and facilitated for improved adaptation. At the core of this argument is the idea that people who are able to move can diversify their livelihoods by providing opportunities for alternative income sources (Foresight, 2011, p. 21; see also Martin, et al. 2014). For example, Black et al. (2011) argue how:

> Migration may be the most effective way to allow people to diversify income and build resilience where environmental change threatens livelihoods. It is therefore necessary to make channels for voluntary migration available (Black et al., 2011).

If migration can function as an adaptation strategy to environmental stressors, a qualification of what comprises an adaptation strategy is needed. First, it has been argued that «the notion of strategy implies goals and objectives» (Moen & Wethington, 1992, p. 235). This implies that the
movement should be planned and part of a strategic decision to improve livelihoods, much in line with the definition of agency above. Similarly, Waltham argues that: «If migration is both planned and voluntary, it can provide a social safety net for loss of income» (Waltham, 2010, p. 7, my italics), and can be linked to the importance of available channels for voluntary migration highlighted by Black et al. In short, there seems to be a consensus that for migration to be regarded as an adaptation strategy, it should be undertaken in a planned and voluntary manner. This is a foundational idea for this analysis. Despite similar in meaning, adaptation should further be distinguished from the idea of ‘coping’. Coping should be understood as the immediate response to a potentially damaging event, while adaptation entails also a longer-term perspective, captured by the criteria of strategies and planning (IPCC/ Field, 2012, p. 51).

As the idea of migration as adaptation is gaining ground, neither the opportunities nor the challenges posed by migration should be ignored (Foresight 2011). The concern is not whether migration from stress-prone areas should be perceived as adaptation or not, but rather under what circumstances migration can be useful as an adaptation tool and thus facilitated to help people secure livelihoods. This does not necessarily mean that migration should be promoted, but rather that such an option should exist so that it can be efficiently undertaken when needed and desired.

To better understand the circumstances in which migration can function as an adaptation strategy, two aspects of migration patterns in environmental stress-prone societies need to be investigated; namely, drivers for migration as well as constraints to undertake such action.

### 3.4.1. Drivers

The Foresight report from 2011 identifies five different but interrelated drivers for migration: economic, social, political, demographic, and environmental. Economic drivers are often perceived as being the most compelling, being the one most often reported by migrants themselves. This is closely linked to the availability of jobs, which is reported as more important than wage differentials (Foresight, 2011, p. 46). This finding is supported and explained by Deshingar (2005), who points to the fact that wages may not be significantly higher in urban than rural areas, but that jobs are more readily available in urban areas and can offer more income stability as opposed to the seasonal nature of income in rural areas. The importance of social drivers concerns marriage-related movements, but is also linked to the existence of social networks and to cultural preferences for migration patterns. This indicates that although economic reasons is often reported to be the main
motive for migrating, social drivers may establish important preconditions for doing so. The same is true for political drivers, where absence of governmental safety nets is likely to be of importance, as are structures of discrimination and marginalization.

Seen through the lens of a livelihood approach, it becomes clear that demographic and environmental drivers are closely linked to the economic motivations so often reported by migrants. When people report that they migrated because they were in need of a job, this may be due to faltering livelihoods in the home community, linked to environmental degradation and subsequent pressure on remaining natural resources, potentially also combined with population growth. Furthermore, demographic drivers are important in terms of age structures where the location of an individual in the life cycle will often be of importance, further being linked to social and cultural factors. Thus, migration should not be seen in light of one driver alone, but through their interaction, as promoted by the livelihood approach. The following figure from Black et al. (2011) is illustrative of how the environment can be an independent driver, while also increasing the effect of other drivers of migration already latent in the system:

![Diagram showing the drivers of migration](source: Black et al. (2011)).

### 3.4.2. Constraints

Drivers of migration can sometimes turn into obstacles for mobility, as migration can be costly to impoverished populations. Generally, such constraints have often been categorized as ecological,
physical, economic or technologic (Adger, 2009, p. 337). What is problematic with these approaches however, is that they are exclusively focusing on factors possible to analyze in quantitative terms as absolute and objective entities (ibid.). Such factors are important, but a narrow focus on these poses a risk of overlooking other underlying factors inherent to the social system in question; for example, how assets are distributed and what is valued in communities. Indeed, as indicated by the Foresight report, obstacles to migration may go beyond mere economic means. A livelihood approach highlights how the ability of an individual or household to secure livelihood is closely linked to socio-contextual factors. To understand whether migration can function as an adaptation strategy to secure livelihood, the social context in which the decision to migrate is made must be investigated in depth because social norms may create constraints that are not easily measured and quantified.

The importance of values has been highlighted in this regard, defined as «the personal or societal judgement of what is valuable and important in life» (Adger, 2009, p. 337). This definition may be vague, but it is important to consider how people weigh income opportunities against other non-economic values when considering migration. In every society, there are several sets of behavior that are deemed appropriate and inappropriate, often linked to distinct groups within the society in question. Social and cultural norms color how potential migrants perceive their different options by discerning what is appropriate behavior. In accordance with what is perceived as appropriate, different alternatives for actions can be expected to lead to differently valued outcomes. Consequently, the perception of different options is of crucial importance to what decisions are made and what actions are carried out (or not) (Martin et al., 2014). Thus, perceptions must be taken into consideration to better understand decisions important to adaptation. Both Adger (2007) and Jones and Boyd (2011) have used the term «social barriers to adaptation» to describe how norms and values cause people to decide against what can be objectively viewed as the most optimal action for adaptation.

One problem with the now fast-growing literature on constraints to adaptation is that no definition has been formulated, creating confusion by applying different synonyms to the same phenomenon —like constraints, barriers and limits (Klein et al., 2014, p. 905). This was dealt with in the fifth assessment report by the International Panel for Climate Change (IPCC), where the term ‘constraints’ is used to describe: «Factors that make it harder to plan and implement adaptation..."
adaptation constraints restrict the variety and effectiveness of options for actors to secure their existing objectives ... Constraints—alone or in combination—can drive an actor or natural system to an adaptation limit (ibid.).

3.4.3. Gender as a determinant for opportunities and constraints

Gender is often highlighted as a factor expected to greatly influence an individual’s migration behavior. Gender can be understood as the social construct that guides what is appropriate behavior for men and women respectively (IOM, 2009, p. 10) and is constantly being reinforced through discourse and organization of society (Catree, et al., 2013). Gender can thus be argued to constitute a social structure, defined as «relatively stable patterns that establish how social interaction will be carried out» (Lindsey, 2011, p. 2).

Treating gender as a social construct rather than as an institution «too commonly used to refer to particular aspects of society» (Risman, 2004, p. 431), helps lift gender to the same «analytic plane» (ibid.) as politics and economics, which are often referred to as overreaching structures of society rather than institutions. This way gender is situated «as embedded not only in individuals but throughout social life» (ibid.), allowing for investigation of the relationship between individual and context. This is important, as gender relations are expected to affect all levels of the migration process, from intra-household relations to global production and trade (Tacoli and Mabala, 2010). Consequently, gender analyzes of migration should include both gendered divisions of labor within the home and in the labor market (Lutz, 2010, p. 1649-1650). Understood as a social structure, gender is placed at the core of the migration process, capturing both decision-making and the different stages of migration itself.

Granted, gender can influence both drivers and constraints for migration. For example, gendered labor markets may create different incentives for migration for men and women in different destination areas. On the other hand, gender can constrain migration through the imposition of perceptions of appropriate behavior if these perceptions conflict with the opportunities that exists (Kabeer, 1991; Adger, 2009; Jones and Boyd, 2011).

3.4.3.1. The household as subject for analysis
As gender is a relational construct, it is difficult to grasp without a closer look at the interactions that form such structures. The most immediate social body for such interaction is the household, an often-used unit of analysis both within migration and gender studies:

Gender relations and hierarchies within the family context affect the migration of women because it is often the context in which female subordination to male authority plays out. The family defines and assigns the roles of women, which determine their relative motivation and incentive to migrate (Boyd & Grieco, 2003).

Against this backdrop, the household will be an important reference for analysis in this study. Following the critique of Sen (1987) and others on the treatment of the household as a unit of consensus, this study will treat the household as an arena for potential intra-household conflict, viewing decision-making as a process of negotiation. This outlook is based on the acknowledgement that individuals, not households, make decisions. At the same time, the household is often the primary unit in which individual decisions are made (Boyd & Grieco, 2003). Thus, intra-household dynamics can help explain individual perceptions of available options.

Whether one views the household as a coherent unit or as comprised of individuals has implications on how adaptation strategies are understood, raising questions of who strategies are for and who they are carried out by. Respondents often report that strategies are adopted to increase the income of the household, not the individual. At the same time, this indicates that not all household members necessarily agree on the strategy chosen, as such decisions are mediated through power relations within the household. These power relations are usually determined by individual characteristics like age and gender. Consequently, a decision, or a household-strategy, may not reflect the outcome desired by all members of the household. Likewise, individual strategies adopted may not represent a household consensus (Moen & Wethington, 1992, p. 239). In line with this argument, it has been recognized that the most frequent chosen adaptive strategy is not necessarily the ‘best’ one. Furthermore, no matter how ‘good’ such adaptive strategies are, there will always be costs at the individual and household level (ibid., p. 242). To capture this difficulty, Kabeer suggests to analyze «individual choices in the context of the household» (Kabeer, 1991, p. 137, author’s italics), a tactic this study will follow.
Caution has been voiced, however, concerning studies of gender and migration that are solely focused on the household. The concern is that these studies effectively forget about gender dynamics present in wider society, outside of household walls (Curran et al., 2006, p. 202). This is handled here through an understanding of gender as a structure transcending all levels of society. Important in this regard is how household dynamics are crucial for the reproduction of gendered stereotypes. This production will have spill-over effects the labor markets, which becomes gendered arenas mirroring the divisions of labor within the households. In short, the labor market will reflect gender inequalities within the societies in which they are embedded (Elson, 1999).

Not only intra-household negotiations, but also the composition of households is important regarding migration. This is because different strategies available to individuals within a household will be closely linked to the individuals’ life cycle. The gendered division of labor within the household prescribes duties in accordance with age, and will particularly affect women as their responsibilities as caretakers heavily influences their ability to take on other tasks throughout the course of their life (Afsar, 1994, p. 229).

### 3.5. A socio-cognitive model for analysis

The concept of social barriers, or constraints, to adaptation is useful when seeking to incorporate gender into understandings of adaptive migration patterns. However, the literature on social barriers to adaptation is somewhat limiting, as it focuses exclusively on gender roles as a constraint to female adaptation. The constraining effect of gender on the availability of adaptation strategies for women is not questioned and will be discussed at length in this study. However, an analytical framework was sought that did not exclude individual agency altogether, but allows for investigating the relationship between opportunities and constraints to see how they interact, and furthermore how human agency is used to mediate these structures. Such a framework of migrants negotiating between different structures draws on Kabeer (1991). However, while Kabeer understands economic incentives from an individual rational choice perspective, economic incentives will be treated here as structuring individual behavior along with cultural norms. The two structures of economic drivers and cultural constraints may affect individual behavior in different directions, and individual agency will arguably have to be exercised in negotiating a balance between the two.
To capture these negotiations, the analytical framework of Grothmann and Patt (2005) was deemed useful. This framework addresses not only what opportunities exist, but also how opportunities are perceived by the actors in question. It considers which opportunities are perceived accessible and how desirable these opportunities are. In arguing that adaptation literature has neglected the importance of motivation and perceived adaptive capacity (Grothmann and Patt, 2005, p. 200), this approach differs from most adaptation theories by incorporating both internal and external factors, adding perceived adaptive capacity to the mainstream understanding of objective adaptive capacities such as resources and access to social networks.

Grothmann and Patt propose «a socio-cognitive model of private proactive adaptation» (p. 203). They divide their model into an individual’s perception of risk and perception of adaptive capacity, labeled ‘risk appraisal’ and ‘adaptation appraisal’ respectively. The former is meant to capture how an individual perceives the probability of a threat and how harmful the potential consequences of that threat are. Adaptation appraisal happens after the risk appraisal is carried out, and is only ‘activated’ if the threat is perceived to be likely and grave. Adaptation appraisal is divided into three subcomponents: 1) how effective the adaptive actions are thought to be (adaptation efficacy), 2) whether the individual perceived it possible to carry out such actions (perceived self-efficacy) and 3) the anticipated costs associated with such actions (perceived adaptation costs). In sum, these three components form the perceived adaptive capacity of the individual. The argument stressed by the authors is that cognitive processes—how individuals perceive the world around them—may be as important as material resources in influencing decision outcomes:

The objective ability or capacity of a human actor only partly determines if an adaptive response is taken. Even as important as this objective ability is, the subjective or perceived ability of human actors because the subjective ability can be very different from the objective ability. ... if agents systematically underestimate their own ability to adapt, this qualifies as a more important ‘bottleneck’ for adaptation than the objective physical, institutional or economic constraints. (Grothmann and Patt, 2005, p. 203).

Understanding gender as a subjective process, where expectations of appropriate behavior for men and women are internalized and then acted out in interaction with others, gender can be expected to influence which actions are perceived as more or less desirable, and subsequently what is seen as normatively and practically possible. Altering the model to include gender as influencing people’s perception of options, the socio-cognitive model proposed by Grothmann and Patt can help shed light on how gendered norms and values in a community may affect who migrates and why.
Accounting for perceptions at the individual level can help further explain the various outcomes that result from seemingly similar situations (Martin et al., 2014). Furthermore, it avoids an «add women and stir» (Massy et al., 2006) approach, which creates models for comparison based on a priori determinants for the different sexes, as the latter fails to show how the relational aspect of gender plays out throughout the migration process (ibid.).

The illustration above shows how gender is thought to influence the individual process if decision-making on whether to stay or to go when environmental stressors create risks.

Source: Based on Grothmann and Patt, 2005.
3.5.1. Perceived limits and trapped populations

Migration and displacement research are both disciplines characterized by a focus on movement (Black and Collier, 2014). However, a growing awareness of people who are prevented from moving can be observed. Such ‘trapped’ populations are expected to bear the greatest costs from environmental stress, as environmental damage may reduce their income and asset base, effectively increasing their vulnerabilities and preventing them from moving (Foresight, 2011: 105).

The idea of trapped populations faces some conceptual difficulties, as it is challenging to distinguish between who wants to stay and who is forced to stay. According to Black and Collyer (2014): «Trapped populations are those people who not only aspire but also need to move for their own protection but who nevertheless lack the ability». According to this definition, to qualify as trapped an individual must both need and want to move. However, including perceptions in the equation complicates this notion. A difficulty arises when individuals express that they ‘want’ to stay, but such want refers to a desire to avoid social or cultural costs rather than avoiding to move per se. If people want to stay because they perceive the social or cultural costs of migration as too high, a potential group of trapped individuals are at risks of being excluded from the definition.

The issue of trapped populations in many aspects mirrors the debate on forced versus voluntary movement. When migration from an area is characterized by forced movement, it indicates a need to move. Consequently, those who do not move may be staying behind due to constraints on their mobility. Considering the aforementioned definition of adaptive constraints, it is possible that cultural constraints have the power to ultimately limit adaptation (Klein et al., 2014, p. 919). Consequently, people can be trapped from the fact that they perceive migration as normatively impossible.

3.6. Hypothesis and working assumptions

Based on an extensive analysis of literature in preparation for this study, and in line with vulnerability and hazard literature, the following hypothesis was formulated:

*Gender norms in Bangladesh restrict women’s, and thus the household’s, utilization of migration as an adaptation strategy in response to environmental stressors.*
Relating to this first over-reaching hypothesis, two additional assumptions were made. First, based on women’s subordinate position within the household and in society, and the subsequent notion that women often have little influence over migration decisions (Barkhat & Ahsan, 2014, p. 30), it was assumed that when female migrants move without their households, they are ‘sent’ with the purpose of delivering remittances. Similarly, women migrating with their households were expected to be passive followers of their migrating husband. Second, in line with women’s presumed submissive role in decision-making, such migration decisions were assumed to be based on consensus. The findings of this study reject these two assumptions, while the general hypothesis holds.
Chapter 4: Methods

This chapter starts with an argument for the choice of research strategy. Thereafter, to secure validity and reliability, the research process and methods used throughout the fieldwork conducted in Bangladesh from early July to mid-October 2014 are described. Then, clarifications of terms and the scope of the study are provided. The chapter concludes with a short discussion of limitations and generalizations.

4.1. Research strategy

Although there is no consensus on the definition of a case study, the following definition is useful. It defines a case study as:

an intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units. A unit connotes a spatially bounded phenomenon ... observed at a single point in time or over some delimited period of time (Gerring, 2004, p. 342).

In the social sciences, there is often a skepticism toward single case studies, degrading such studies to a ‘mere’ case study (Gerring, 2004, p. 241), with the rejection that such studies are not generalizable. However, «much of what we know about the empirical world is drawn from case studies» (ibid). Case studies are especially useful where little previous research exists, so-called explorative case studies, (ibid., p. 349). Indeed, «it is pointless to seek to explain what we have not described with a reasonable degree of precision» (King et al., 1994, p. 44). Furthermore, case studies are convenient when the context is of central importance to the issue at hand (Yin, 1994, p. 13), and when an understanding of actors’ motivations is necessary to better comprehend the effects (Gerring, 2004, p. 348). In view of these thoughts, a case study was deemed appropriate to answer the proposed research question. Generally, it is important to note that:

While some level of generalization regarding opportunities and constraints that are common to different regions, sectors, communities, and actors is possible, the manner in which they manifest is context dependent. ... significant work remains in understanding such context-specific determinants of vulnerability and adaptive capacity and in effectively using the knowledge gained from available case studies to facilitate adaptation more broadly (Klein et al., 2014, p. 908).

Against this backdrop, Bangladesh stood out for several reasons. Although climate change and environmental migration are both global phenomena, not all areas of the world will be affected in
the same way or to the same degree. Therefore, the accessibility of migration as an adaptation tool will vary in importance. As a country where migration is already vital as a means of income-diversification (Afsar, 2003; Siddiqui, 2003), Bangladesh is also often described as one of the world’s most vulnerable countries to climate change. It is highly exposed and sensitive to environmental stressors and lacks sufficient adaptive capacity to respond to these. Thus, the demand for migration opportunities in Bangladesh can be expected to be high and of increasing importance, whereas availability may not match the need to undertake such measures.

Gender influences the process of migration in terms of availability, process and outcome. It is also believed that such effects will be stronger where gender inequalities are greater. Bangladesh is a country where gender inequalities persist, as exemplified both in disaster literature and elsewhere. Thus, Bangladesh is a country where one can expect to see strong effects of gender on migration behavior. Furthermore, although gender is indeed a global phenomenon, it is increasingly argued that gender is context-dependent both across time and space (Donato et al., 2006, p. 4), which adds to the argument for a case study.

Against this backdrop of high vulnerability to environmental stressors, the importance of mobility, deep-seated gender inequalities, and the gap that has been shown to exist in literature on the topic, Bangladesh was deemed an appropriate case to answer the research question of this study. Because of the explorative nature of the research, along with constraints on time and resources, a single-case study was chosen over a cross-unit analysis.

4.2. The research process

Due to the lack of quantitative data addressing internal migration in Bangladesh (Shahreen, personal communication, August 18, 2014), qualitative tools were used, taking inspiration from «second generation» vulnerability assessments, which highlight the importance of direct interaction with stakeholders of vulnerability and adaptation (Jones and Boyd, 2011, p. 1267). The research process was carried out in two phases. The first phase was largely deductive and investigated the potential existence of female environmental migrants. This phase consisted of an extensive literature review; six interviews with academic specialists on gender, climate change and development; and preliminary visits to the slum field site for informal conversations with slum dwellers and key informant interviews. Work during the first phase led to the conclusion that female
migration for environmental reasons does occur. The first phase also helped finalize the choice of field sites. Both topics are further discussed in Chapter 6.

4.2.1. Selection of the first field site

Acknowledging the lack of information on internal migration in Bangladesh, and the fact that many migrating women seem to take up work in the RMGs, it was intuitive to conduct the first part of the field work in Dhaka, where the majority of garment factories are located. Although many do settle elsewhere, a significant number of poor migrants settle in the slums in and around cities (Walshan, 2010, p. 15). Furthermore, because of their low income, many garment workers are slum dwellers. Thus, the smaller geographical areas that slums constitute aided in identifying female migrants. The Bhola bustee (bangla word for informal settlement or slum) particularly stood out because the overwhelming majority of its inhabitants are from the Bhola district, which is highly exposed to environmental stressors. The shared origin of the inhabitants provided a unique opportunity to investigate migration patterns within a community split into migrants and non-migrants.

Consultation with researchers familiar with the Bhola bustee confirmed that independently migrating women live in this slum. Preliminary visits involving conversations with local leaders, key informants and slum dwellers furthermore confirmed that the overwhelming majority of women living in the Bhola bustee are working, having migrated with their husbands, as the head of their household, or to provide for their families back in the village.

In addition to the discovery of numerous female wage-earning migrants, the preliminary research revealed how the slum’s location within Dhaka is relevant to the study. The slum is located in the Mirpur area, home to many garment factories that constitute an important income source for women. Accordingly, it was often pointed out that these factories provide an important source of income for households in the slum. While the factories employ both men and women, the majority of factory workers are women. Male slum dwellers, on the other hand, seemed to lack sufficient income opportunities.

Moselin, an older male slum dweller, explained how he used to live in the Korail slum, the largest slum in Dhaka located closer to the city center between Banani and Gulshan. He moved to Bhola bustee soon after it was established in the 90s so that he could be closer to his home community. He said he regrets moving to the Bhola bustee, as there are less working opportunities there than was
the case in Korail. This dynamic of labor opportunities for male and female slum dwellers makes the Bhola bustee an interesting site for gender comparisons. The gendered labor market characteristic of the Mirpur area may serve as an additional pull factor for women. This is in comparison to other slums, where there are less immediate job opportunities available to women (Moselin, personal communication, August 11, 2014; Mustafa, personal communication, August 14, 2014). Consequently, the Bhola bustee was chosen as the first field site, and one and a half month was spent on frequent visits here.

4.2.2. Selection of the second field site

After numerous visits to the Bhola bustee it became evident that a better understanding of the local context from which people have migrated was needed. It seemed that the behavior of the slum dwellers could be directly related to the expectations they used to, and still did, face back in the village. To visit their home district was expected to give a better sense of this community’s attitude toward migration, and how perceptions may differ with regard to male and female migrants with the potential of influencing migration decisions. The Bhola district is of particular interest in thought of its location in the southern belt of Bangladesh, which is known for observing more traditional gender roles compared to other areas of the country. This tension between a strong tradition of purdah (female exclusion) in the sending area and income opportunities that favor women in the destination area allows for exploration of the complexity of gender relations in the migration process of this community. Against this backdrop, it was decided to conduct fieldwork also in the Bhola district. Two weeks were spent here in the second half of September 2014.

The research conducted in the Bhola district was spread across three villages located in the three following Union Parishads of the northeastern part of Bhola Island: Illishia, Dhania, and Sayeddpur. This number was chosen to get a sense of whether and to what extent attitudes changed across villages, as well as the acknowledgment that curiosity and hospitality may quickly turn into frustration when it is realized that one is not there to ‘help’ (being an NGO - see point of ethical challenges below). Therefore, only a few days were spent in each place not impose on people’s daily lives.

At the same time, not to create too great variation in the field sites, the villages visited were only a few kilometers apart. Two methods were used to identify these field sites. From the interviews and informal conversations conducted in the Bhola bustee it became clear that not only are most of the
slum dwellers from the Bhola district, the majority of them seem to be from Ilisha in the very north of Bhola. Furthermore, the most frequent environmental stressor reported by migrants was river bank erosion and the subsequent flooding and interruptions of labor work this creates.

Along with this information, a hazard map showing the areas prone to river bank erosion in southern Bangladesh was used as a guide (see picture below). Starting out in Ilisha, two additional villages were visited, located south of Ilisha on the eastern bank of the island. As can be observed at the hazard map, areas located further south than the selected field sites are even more prone to river bank erosion, and these areas should arguably also have been investigated. However, with Ilisha as a natural starting point it was deemed too time consuming to go further south, also risking a too great spread in variations of field sites.

The map shows river bank erosion (red) and accretion (blue) along the Bangladeshi coastline from 1973-2005. Source: Maminul Haque Sarker and CEGIS (Innam, 2009).

4.3. Interviews

Throughout the second phase of the research process, formal interviews were carried out in the field sites selected. Taking the form of semi-structured and open ended interviews, a total of nine male and 14 female interviews, as well as four focus group discussions, were conducted in the Bhola bustee and the Bhola district. In addition, interviews with key informants were organized. Key
informants included local leaders, non-governmental organizations, and local government officials, summing up to four in Dhaka and seven in the Bhola district.

Before starting formal interviewing, test interviews were conducted with both the male and the female translator (see section on translation below). This led to few changes of questions, but helped improve interaction and formulation of questions throughout the interview process. As few questions were changed, and due to their high relevance to the study, three female test interviews have been included in the final material. This explains some of the imbalance between the number of male and female interviews. It should further be mentioned that a number of informal conversations took place throughout the research process, of which the overwhelming majority were with men, further weighing up for the additional number of formal female interviews.

In short, the one-to-one interviews were broken into the following topics: reasons for migration; perceptions; and sustainability. The check-list was customized to the individual characteristics of the respondents, as well as developed along the way as new questions emerged.

4.3.1. Identification of respondents

Based on the definition of environmental migrants below (see section for operationalizations), identification of respondents was based on self-reporting. If one or more environmental stressors were reported as key reasons for migrating, the respondent qualified as an environmental migrant. Importantly, the environmental stressor needed not be the sole reason, nor the triggering factor, for migrating as a too strict criteria for environmental push factors would risk the exclusion of other interacting factors of interest to this study. It should be noted that not all respondents are migrants, as interviews were also conducted with non-migrants in the Bhola district to gain a better understanding of perception of migrants in the home community.

Several entry points were used for identification of respondents. The use of NGOs for this purpose was deliberately avoided, as this creates a risk of bias to promote own work. Some respondents were approached directly, while others were identified through the method of snowballing. It was, however, avoided using the same entry point for snowballing more than a few times each, as this also runs a risk self-selection (Bengtson, 2011, p.122).
The interviews lasted between 30-90 minutes each, with the average being around 1 hour. This length developed naturally, the respondents seldom having more time to spare. The latter point also lead to the decision to split two of the group discussions into two sessions, allowing the respondents to decide the time and length of the discussions.

The four focus group discussions numbered 6-8 participants each. One was conducted in the slum with male day laborers, while three were conducted in the Bhola district, representing fishermen; women not taking part in wage work; and female retuning garment workers respectively. For freer discussions, similarity in economic status and occupation, as well as similar connections with migrating working women was ensured in all group discussions. The latter was deemed of importance because on the evident stigma of migrating wage-earning women. Age was also considered to the extent possible, as strict hierarchies exist in Bangladeshi culture based on both age and gender. For a complete list of interviewees, see annex 1.

4.3.2. Ethical considerations and challenges

4.3.2.1. Informed consent
Great care was taken to obtain informed consent from the respondents before any individual interview or group discussion was begun. Information was shared with the respondents concerning the background of the researcher, what the research was broadly about, and how the information would be used. Time was also spent in the aftermath of the interview to answer questions and explain how the information collected would be used further.

A substantial amount of time was spent on explaining that we were conducting research, not development work, an issue which has been a great challenge throughout the whole research project. Grünenfielder reports facing similar challenges in her field work in Pakistan:

During fieldwork in a rural area of Hazera region, it became clear that villagers became more and more suspicious of our research team because villagers did not know the character and goals of the research we conducted (Grünenfelder, 2014, p. 219).

Consent forms were not used, as many of the respondents are illiterate - and more important - may not have the full understanding of what such a signature signifies. Thus, although informed consent is at the core of ethical considerations in field work, the ethical aspect may arguably be
overshadowed by legal concerns, that is, it becomes more important to obtain a legal binding signature than the trust of the respondent. It was felt that having respondents sign a legally binding document would increase the level of asymmetry already existent between the researcher and respondent, something which was constantly sought to be kept at a minimum.

However, confidence is felt that informed consent was obtained and that respondents had an understanding of what they were taking part in. To secure privacy of the respondents, all names have been changed, and will not be shared with third parties, nor will the recordings. Furthermore, the specific village names of the three field sites in Bhola will not be used, as it was requested by a female respondent not to do so. Instead, the names of the Union Parishads are used, which represents the next level of geographical division. It is not felt that information is lost by using the Union rather than the village name.

4.3.2.2. Age of respondents
First, a note have to be made that most, if not all, of the respondents’ reported ages are approximate, as most do not know their exact age. Next, most of the girls that have migrated independently to work in garments are between 15-20 years old, meaning that a large number of them are below 18 years of age. As these girls have often migrated independently, their parents could not be asked for consent. On the other hand, the girls are already trusted with the burden of work, often being the main income earner of their household and living in the city without their immediate family. It was therefore judged that the girls interviewed were responsible enough to make the decision of whether or not to take part in the interviews. Extra care was made, however, to make sure that they understood what they were taken part in, and to shift the topic of the conversation if they were visibly uncomfortable.

4.3.2.3. The issue of privacy
The interviews were sought to be conducted in a trusted environment to the respondents. Thus, respondents were always asked where they wanted to carry out the interviews. This was usually in their homes or in homes of friends. When no home was available, the local office located by the entrance of the slum was easily accessible.

Further, privacy was strived for, but proved challenging due to evident impracticalities,
both in the context of the slum and in the village. Walls are paper thin with open windows, making it easy to hear what is being said inside, and private conversations are generally unheard of. Consequently, it has to be accounted for that respondents did not talk as freely as is to be desired, as it was not possible to obtain as much privacy as sought for. Furthermore, the respondents may have felt exposed in the situation of not being able to rely on the support of the group. However, the one-to-one interviews, and the effort to make them private was deemed both useful and necessary, as personal information is hard to obtain otherwise. Especially the hierarchical norms inherent in Bangladeshi culture made this essential.

4.4. Translation and transcription

When conducting interviews in the Bhola bustee, a male translator was used for male interviews and a female translator for the female interviews. In the Bhola district, however, due to limited resources, only a male translator was used. Thus, additional energy was used to make sure that trust was established with the female respondents at these field sites. Although information may have been lost, information was also obtained in the sense that gendered patterns became clearer from an outsider perspective.

The translators were thereafter asked to transcribe the interviews verbatim to the extent possible. It has to be acknowledged that the level of English did somewhat vary and that it has in some instances been necessary to correct some language in the finished transcripts. Care has been taken not to change the content of the sentences adjusted, and when this could not ensured, the relevant passages were left out.

4.5. Scope and operationalizations

This section clarifies terms central for this study but not defined in the discussion thus far, and sets out the scope of the study.

First, no claim will be made in this paper about the link between climate change and environment. Rather, the aim is to look at a community well known to be influenced by environmental stressors, to see how these stressors affect the lives of the villagers and what is done in response, with an emphasis on how gender relations play out throughout this process. Here will be used the term *environmental stressors*, defined as environmental factors having a negative impact on a household’s or individual’s livelihoods as defined in the conceptual framework.
A migrant refers to an individual who have moved and have or will be residing in the new destination for more than 3 months. Furthermore, here will be used the inclusive definition by the IOM, which defines an environmental migrant as:

persons or groups of persons who, for compelling reasons of sudden or progressive change in the environment that adversely affects their lives or living conditions, are obliged to leave their habitual homes, or choose to do so, either temporarily or permanently, and who move either within their country or abroad (Laczko and Ahgarzarm, 2009, p. 19).

This definition includes both forced and voluntary movement, basing the threshold for inclusion rather on whether the movement was due to a ‘compelling reason’. In this study, disruption or complete loss of livelihoods due to environmental stressors, combined with lack of alternative income sources in the home district is argued to be a compelling reason.

Concerning female migrants, it will here be used two terms, namely independent migrant and active migrant. The former is common in migration literature, and is referring to women who migrate independently from their household. It should be noted, however, that also women who travel with other family members do exercise agency. Therefore, the latter term is meant to capture the agency of women who are migrating - or simply traveling - with their husband or other male household members, as such agency is often overlooked with the assumption that they are passive followers of male guardians.

Mixed flows of voluntary and forced migrants are evident in the receiving community of this study. It varies whether individuals have been displaced before migrating to urban areas, and thus to what extent the migration can be understood as reactive or proactive adaptation, that is, whether the adaptive measure is taken in response to an expected or already occurring environmental event. Some effort has been made to take this into account, as it is of interest to the study how proactive adaptation can be promoted. At the same time, to attempt strict categorization seems meaningless and the migrants in this study seems best captured by the idea of a «displacement-migration nexus» (Koser and Martin, 2011).

Moreover, this study will focus almost exclusively on private, as opposed to public, adaptation measures, as the state is essentially absent in this context. The role of the state should, however, be
kept in mind when reading the policy recommendations at the end of this paper. Furthermore, it is of importance to note that the case study takes place in a both highly vulnerable and impoverished community. Although interlinked, the two concepts should not be confused. Poverty is here understood as a multidimensional phenomena, based on the definition by Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (2001):

Poverty is a human condition characterized by the sustained or chronic deprivation of the resources, capabilities, choices, security and power necessary for the enjoyment of an adequate standard of living (CESCR, 2001, point 8).

As further noted however, «it is important nonetheless to retain the understanding that poverty-related deprivations are deprivations that are related to the lack of income or access to other productive or economic resources» (CESR, 2009, p. 2), which reconnects poverty with low income or lack of livelihoods. Consequently, the study concerns men and women who are poor and typically low-skilled, and the findings have to be read in this context, as migration flows can be expected to vary highly with class within and from Bangladesh.

Lastly, a household is normally thought to be created with the «establishment of a new residence by a married couple» (De Sherbinin, 2006, p. 17), and has to be distinguished from the concept of a family. A household is usually understood as the family members living under the same roof, implicating that they are part of the same household economy. Thus, a household is similar, but not identical with, the concept of a family, which can be extended outside the household in question.

4.6. Limitations: Representation and generalization

First, as close to no quantitative data on internal migration in Bangladesh exists, and even less so data specified by sex, the volume of female migration patterns is difficult to determine. This lack of data also makes it impossible to track changes over time, making predictions a difficult task.

Second, gender roles are deeply embedded in social, religious, and cultural custom, and are therefore highly contextualized. Thus, a note should be made both on how the Bhola district and the Bhola bustee may differ from other contexts both within and outside of Bangladesh, with a special note on how class and level of income will affect whether women take up work and for what purpose. Consequently, the findings of this study cannot immediately be transferred to other contexts.
The aim of this study is not to be generalizable, but to set out an introductory look at the question of gender in environmental migration, and the ability and efficiency of using migration as an adaptive measure for women compared to men. Therefore, this thesis is not conclusive, but potentially pointing to areas for future research.
Section 2
Findings and Analysis
Chapter 5: Context

This chapter sets out the context of the Bhola community. First, livelihoods and vulnerability in Bhola are described. Thereafter, a discussion of female migration within Bangladesh follows. Lastly, a description of the Bhola bustee, a destination area for many migrants from the Bhola district, is provided.

5.1. Vulnerability in Bangladesh

Bangladesh is repeatedly referred to as one of the world’s most vulnerable countries to climate change. Being situated in one of the world’s largest river deltas, the country is prone to a range of environmental stressors which are expected to increase both in intensity and frequency with changing climate. Consequently, the daily lives of the Bangladeshi people have always been highly influenced by weather events, closely coupling environment and human well-being. However, as noted above, being exposed to environmental stressors is not the same as being vulnerable to these:

While physical exposure is an important aspect of the vulnerability for both human populations and natural systems to climate change, a lack of adaptive capacity is often the most important factor (Nicholls et al., 2007, p. 336).

The high vulnerability of Bangladeshi communities has to be understood against the backdrop of widespread poverty in a sizable and highly dense population within the territory of a largely dysfunctional government, both factors which result in lack of available coping strategies when environmental stressors destroys livelihoods. Bangladesh is the most densely populated country in the world, with 1 square meter per person, numbering 156.6 million in 2013 (World Bank, «Bangladesh»), which is a conservative estimation. 76.5 per cent of the population still lived on less than 2 dollars a day in 2010 (ibid). 63 per cent of the country’s workforce is engaged in the primary sector, including the majority of the county’s poor, who are often inhabiting remote and ecologically fragile parts of the country, numbering more than 50 million people (Waltham, 2010: x). When interacting with these social, economic, and political characteristics, environmental stressors pose a risk of creating a negative spiral which is difficult to break, potentially canceling out development progress as well as blocking for future development. When livelihoods are lost, so are the means to produce an income and other necessities of life (Sherpert et al., 2013, p. viii).

5.2. Vulnerabilities and livelihoods in the Bhola district
The coastal zone is highlighted as particularly vulnerable, as it is affected by a complex array of environmental stressors. This was evident in the southern district of Bhola, situated where freshwater from the rivers meets saltwater from the Bay of Bengal, exposing the district to the activity of two rivers, as well as to tidal changes and cyclones from the ocean. Compared to other areas in Bangladesh, not much information exists about Bhola. The district is home to nearly two million (BBS, 2013, p. ix) and covering an area about the size of Rhode Island. The district is poverty-stricken, partly because it is not connected to the mainland. It is estimated that 20.4 per cent of the population in this district live below the lower national poverty line, while 33.2 per cent live below the upper national poverty line (BBS, 2010).

Out of the many environmental stressors affecting the area, river bank erosion was reported by the overwhelming majority of the respondents interviewed in Bhola bustee as the main environmental stressor that had influenced their decision to move. Also government officials in Bhola reported river bank erosion to be the most serious problem facing the district, especially so in the northern part of the Island (Arzu, personal communication, September 21, 2014). The Meghna River strips soil from the island’s eastern bank and, in the process, destroys farmland and displaces families. When asked where they grew up, people will often point into the river. The typical story is that their childhood home does not exist anymore, and many have moved multiple times in their lives. River bank erosion differs from other kinds of environmental stressors because it may permanently displace people from their land, which is, for many, an important source of income, capital savings, family cohesion, and cultural attachment.

Those who are living here used to have a lot of land and wealth before. With time, the river ... has taken away all their land. Some people have built their houses again and again. But what will they live on? Again the house is washed away (Mustafa, personal communication, August 17, 2014).

Up to 100 000 people are displaced by river bank erosion in Bangladesh each year (Rahman, 2010: 59), and is «considered to be one of the principal contributors to the process of impoverishment and marginalisation of rural families due to the loss of productive agricultural lands» (Poncelet et al., 2010, p. 213). In Bhola, as elsewhere in Bangladesh, the majority of people are functionally landless, owning less than 0.8 hectares of land. Under such circumstances even a small loss of land will be devastating (Uddin and Basak, n.d., p. 6). Illustrative is how it can take a family several decades to recover from the impacts of the loss of their land (ibid). This is further aggravated by the
additional loss of infrastructure, such as «flood embankments, schools, hospitals, cultural and religious monuments» (Rahman, 2010, p. 58).

Above: River bank erosion in Syeddpur Union.

The main occupations in Bhola are fishing and farming (Arzu, personal communication, September 21, 2014). The fishermen represents the poorest strata of society in the district and live close to the river where land is cheap. According to respondents, to buy land a couple of kilometers inland is about five times more expensive than buying land in immediate proximity to the river. Furthermore, it makes little sense for this population group to live far from the river since fishing is the only livelihood available. «Samira», a recent migrant from Ilishia, explained it this way:

Imagine if they build their houses far from the river. It will take them longer to come and go from work. ... That is why they build small houses by the river and live in those houses. ... Poor people can’t go up. They stay where they are born.

As indicated by «Samira», few income generating activities exist outside of the primary sector in Bhola. A group of young men in Ilishia explained how they are unable to get a job despite the fact
that they have finished eight years of schooling. This is because, they said, corruption excludes poor candidates in the job-seeking process. The exclusion stems from the expectation of bribes from job-seekers, something which poor households cannot afford.

Poor fishing families suffer the worst from river bank erosion, lacking resources to move further inland. In some cases, these people find themselves with no choice but to live on the side of the embankment in irregular settlements. These settlements are not only routinely flooded, but are also highly vulnerable to erosion and destructive wave action from the river. In northern Bhola, riverbank erosion locks people who were already poor into an often inescapable cycle of poverty and vulnerability. This resonates with what has been termed «transient poverty», where rather than being able to save for adaptive measures, communities are forced to constantly cope. This increases vulnerabilities to future environmental stressors (IPCC, 2012, p. 51).

River bank erosion is both a slow and a sudden process. The river is constantly taking small bites from the river bank and, at the same time, weakening large areas of soil which will eventually break off and fall into the river. Intense wave action caused by storms accelerates erosion and floods settlements on both sides of the island’s faltering embankment. This was visible in all areas visited along the river.

A further consequence of river bank erosion is that it causes the embankments supporting villages alongside the river from flooding to be destroyed on a regular basis, which leads to flooding of homes and farmlands. As one female villager explained: «We live in the river; we float with the
Illustrative of this was how flood water from two months back was still trapped between the houses. During the summer’s monsoon season, the villagers explained, people stayed home and «waited for the water» ten out of 20 days. During the high tide, the water would reach as high as people’s chests. During these ten days, for every sixth hour, three hours at the time, people had to tie their belongings to the ceiling and climb onto the roof, waiting for the water to pass. During this time, the villagers were unable to conduct their income earning activities. This is highly problematic, as they have little or no buffer to rely on. Furthermore, it was reported that the fish stock only provides sufficient income three months of the year, the peak being during the rainy season. Coinciding with the flood season, the fishing communities face great economic challenges when flooding prevents them from fishing during this time.

During the remaining days, when water levels were lower, people simply had to «go with the water» and do their best to conduct their daily business. When the water withdrew, it took land with it. By the river bank, it looked like a bulldozer had torn everything apart; bushes and trees were lying in the mud, overturned by the water. In short, the effects of river bank erosion ripple out into every aspect of life in Bhola. Land provides income for many on the island, and the loss of cropland pushes men used to farming into other trades, especially fishing, with which they have little experience.

In addition to river bank erosion and related floods, lack of food was a recurrently mentioned reason for migrating. The reason for such food insecurity was reported to be due either to poverty from river bank erosion or by «less fish in the river». The reason for this decline in fish stock is unclear, but may be due to a combination of overfishing from the increase in the number of fishermen, use of finely woven current nets which kills the fry before reproducing, and environmental factors like more saltwater and silt pushing fish further up the river. Fish being a fundamental natural resource to these households’ livelihoods, declining fish stocks is a third push factor for migration from Bhola to Dhaka.

For the women of these households there are close to no income opportunities in the Bhola district. Some women make a little income from making and selling tupis, but the income from this activity is limited as the income barely exceeds the expenses.
5.3. Migration from Bhola

Consequently, there is a clear need for income diversification among the poor households in the Bhola district, and for many the solution is, as already indicated, migration. People tend to move to either Chittagong or Dhaka to work as day laborers, in the garments, or as domestic workers, depending on their gender, age, and social networks.

Migration patterns from Bhola to Dhaka (and other urban areas) follow a systematic pattern. As shown above, especially poor people are affected by the river bank erosion simply because they are forced to live close to the river. River bank erosion can happen both in a slow and sudden fashion. People may be displaced overnight, or deeming it necessary to move as the river is eating its way closer to home. Thus, a substantial number are displaced within their home district before moving to urban areas. Migrants explained how they had only migrated when they did no longer have the means to buy a new plot of land on which to build their new home. This is supported by the findings of Action Aid Bangladesh:

When disaster events strike people 'move' somewhere nearby from where they can easily return to where they came from. More permanent migration occurs when economic and social issues 'pull or push' them later. Decisions relating to whether migration is long or short distance, or permanent or temporary, depend on the extent to which livelihoods are affected (Shamshuddoha, 2012, p. 20).

The story of «Habib», a male slum dweller who came to Dhaka from Ilisha as a child, further confirms this story:

We faced river erosion three times. The first two erosions caused a huge loss to us. It washed everything away. Yet we did not leave our village. We lived on the bank of the river though most of this land belonged to others. But the third erosion took away everything along with our last hope. Then what to do! We built a small hut on side of the highway. We lived there for 2-3 years. But it became hard to continue living there as the highway was a common route for busses. Anything could have happened. ... Then finally my father decided to move to Dhaka (Focus group discussion, September 17, 2014).

Furthermore, when asking who these migrants typically are, two somewhat contrary answers emerged. First, people reported that the migrants are the ones that have lost everything to river bank erosion and have no other option than to move to urban areas for wage work. In this sense, migration seemed to be perceived as a last resort. At the same time, people explained that the migrants are those who ‘have the money to go’. These contradicting statements reflects two things.
First, migration cost money. Some households wait until they no longer have the means to go, illustrating how drivers for migration can easily turn into constraints and ultimately limit the ability migrate. Others may lack the skill or health to do so. The households that still have health and assets left, often sell their last belongings to buy a ticket to Dhaka, the minimum price being 300 taka per person. Those who do not, risk being trapped in informal settlements alongside the embankments. In this way, it makes sense that migrants can have lost most of their assets, but at the same time being the ones still having the money to go. The contradicting explanation furthermore seems to reflect a split view on migration among the villagers. People generally perceive it as undesirable to leave their home village, and in this sense felt sorry for those who were forced to do so. «Who feels happy about leaving their father’s village?» («Rayahana»). At the same time, they seemed to perceive people who had gone to Dhaka as better off than themselves.

Whether the whole household migrate together or only one or a few household members move, depends on two factors. First, as explained by Action Aid, the disturbance of livelihoods is an important factor. Unsurprisingly, if the household no longer have any place to live, the whole household will typically move together. Often, however, a household knows it will be displaced soon, and may send a household member to save money for a new plot of land. As the household’s goal is to remain in Bhola, only household members with wage-earning capacities will go. This is because a non-working migrant represents an economic liability, having to pay rent but earning nothing. Who migrate depends, as will be described in further length below, on the composition of the household in terms both of the household members’ life-cycle and gender. Second, the composition of the household in terms of the members’ life cycles sometimes cause the whole household to migrate. This will be further explained in chapter 7.

5.4. Female seclusion and female migration Patterns in Bangladesh

5.4.1. Purdah

To better contextualize the following analysis, some background information on gender roles, and perceptions of women and work in Bangladesh is needed. Bangladesh is characterized by traditional gender norms, being both a patriarchal and patrilineal society. When a girl marries, she moves to the household of her husband, often breaking contact with her natal family. Despite being prohibited in 1980, Bangladesh has seen a revival of the practice of dowry since the 1970s, replacing the bride
price. Consequently, the economic benefits from marriage go to the family of the groom rather than the family of the bride.

A Bangladeshi household will typically revolve around a married couple, the husband being economically responsible to provide for his wife, his children, and his parents. The married couple has no responsibilities toward the wife’s parents, although in practice this varies across households, depending on whether the husband acknowledges a responsibility toward his in-laws. It does not depend on whether the wife is making an income, although it is of importance, but on whether the husband approves of her spending shares of her income on her natal family.

Gender roles are further sustained through the strong position of the cultural practice of purdah in the Bangladeshi society, which literally means ‘curtain’. More generally, purdah can be understood as «the broader set of norms and structures that set standards of female morality» (Amin, 1997, p. 213), and «restrict [women’s] mobility in the public domain» (Kabeer et al, 2011, p. 7). The reasoning behind this custom is to protect the women in question, as explained by Imam «Mohammed Khalil»: «women are precious and of value. Therefore, they have to be kept at home where no one can harm them, to make sure they are safe» (Khalil, personal communication, September 22, 2014). Excluded from the public, the home naturally becomes women’s domain and will affect the division of labor among household members. According to purdah norms, men are required to provide for the family by generating income outside of the home, while women are obliged to take care of domestic tasks. Such tasks include collection of wood and water, cooking, animal rearing and other tasks that can be carried out within the safe sphere of the home (Kabeer et al., 2011, p. 7).

Tools for maintaining of purdah practices can be divided into physical segregation and covering of the female body (Papanek, 1973, p. 294). When stepping outside, women are expected to act with modesty and to cover their body, and potentially also their face, not to attract the unwanted attention of men. The most immediate expression of such protection of the female body is the veil or the burkha. While the burkha is not very common in Bangladesh, several levels of veiling exists. The most common is to use a dupatta, which is a long shawl that can be loosely draped over the head and chest. Others would simply tie the sari in a way that would allow them to cover their heads with the tip, and permit several degrees of covering similar to the dupatta. The most conservative will wear an al-amira, a two-piece veil which includes a close fitting cap, combined with the robe-like
abaya, some also wearing the clad covering their faces. A larger degree of veiling is common in the rural than urban areas, especially so in the Southern part of Bangladesh.

5.4.2. Women, work and migration

In view of the stronghold of purdah, the idea of working women is contested in Bangladesh, as this requires women to step out of the home on a regular basis. However, it has been noted how:

The modernization of the agricultural systems and the static work situation in the villages, persistent poverty and regular natural disasters have forced women to migrate to the cities with their families as well as independently (Huq-Hussain, 1995, p. 51).

Huq-Hussain (1995) shows how female income ensures food security for one quarter of rural households, contributing as much as one quarter to half of their income. Now 20 years old, these numbers may be outdated. They do however indicate that female migration can play an important role in household’s income diversifying strategies, a notion also supported by Afsar (2005). Indeed more recent numbers by Banks (2013) shows that female contributions make up 38 per sent of households’ income across four slums in Dhaka. Especially important for this development has been the emergence of the Ready Made Garments (RMG) industry in Bangladesh from the 1980s onward. According to Afsar (2003), throughout the mid-1990s, the RGM sector in Bangladesh absorbed 1.5 million workers «of which 70% were women and 90% were migrants». These numbers are also supported by Amin et al., (1998, p. 186). Afsar furthermore notes how:

There is a positive correlation between higher sex ratio and higher urban growth for all metropolitan cities. A high sex ratio suggests that more men than women migrated to these cities. The migration was likely to be temporary, as the men seldom migrated with their families. Over time, however, the sex ratio became more balanced because women began to migrate to urban areas independently, largely as a result of the boom in the mid-1980s in the ready-made garment (RMG) industry (Afsar, 2003, p. 2, my italics).

Today it is estimated that around four million workers are employed in the garments sector, and that women constitute 80 per cent of these workers. A precaution should be made regarding the 80 per cent mark, however, as it is unclear exactly how the gathering of such sex-disaggregated data has been carried out. The source of the number seems to be the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), and it is questionable whether this organization has the means to conduct such a data gathering exercise (Jansen, personal communication, February 28, 2014). It is
not contested, however, that women make up a substantial part of the production line in the garments factories, and that these jobs have provided a new income source for Bangladeshi women. That Afsar (2003) furthermore shows that a majority of these women are migrants makes it clear that female migration is indeed a phenomenon in Bangladesh.

Interestingly, it is further established that a large number of female garment workers are from the central and southern parts of the country, overlapping with degree of landlessness (Afsar, 2002, p. 111). The southern belt of Bangladesh is also known to be highly prone to environmental stressors, and as shown in Bhola, landlessness is closely linked to poverty, vulnerability, and environmental stress. Consequently, it seems a reasonable expectation that a link between environmental drivers and female rural urban migration for wage work exists. This is also suggested by Shamshuddoha et al. (2012).

... foreign remittances and ready-made garments are the two highest earning foreign currency sectors in Bangladesh and also the two biggest contributors to the country's annual budget. Interestingly, these two sectors rely significantly on migrant workers from areas badly affected by or prone to disasters (Shamshuddoha et al., 2012, p. 28).

5.4.3 Female migration from Bhola to Dhaka
An estimation of the volume of female migration flows from Bhola to other urban areas cannot be established here. However, an important finding of the study is simply that the trend seems much larger than first assumed. The first assessment was done in the Bhola bustee, where it was found that within this migrating community, an overwhelming majority of the women were income earners. Three categories of migrating women were found (Monira, personal communication, July 10, 2014): 1) women having migrated with their husbands, 2) women being the head of their households, typically being divorced or widowed, and 3) or young unmarried women migrating in order to provide for themselves and their families back in the village.

Furthermore, in the Bhola district, when asked about female migration, every villager knew women who had moved, often responding «yes, a lot, a lot». Somewhat surprisingly, in several conversations with villagers in Bhola, it was reported that almost equal numbers of women and men migrate. Representatives for the department of social welfare in the Bhola district even asserted that more women migrate than men, especially so the unmarried and the widowed. Thus, a trend of actively migrating women from the Bhola community, both with their household and independently, could be established to exist.
5.5. A place of destination: The Bhola bustee

Although not every migrant moving from rural to urban areas will end up in informal settlements, or slums, it is established that a significant number do (Washan, 2010, p. 18). Estimates of the number of slums in Dhaka varies. According to World Vision, there exists about 5000 different slums in the city. Mirpur, located on the western outskirts of the city, houses 405 of them (Palma et al., Personal Communication, October 12, 2014). The Bhola bustee is one of these, and got its name from the fact that most of its inhabitants are migrants from the Bhola district. Many people moved from Bhola to Dhaka after the 1970 cyclone, also named the Bhola cyclone, killing between 300 000-500 000 people of which the overwhelming majority were from the Bhola district («The great Bhola cyclone»). The slum was however not established until during the 1980s-1990s. The timeline is somewhat unclear, and it seems that the slum was established before the 1991 cyclone. However, this cyclone is known to have led to a new influx of people from the South to the capital, and may have expanded the slum significantly. In the process, migrants from Bhola who had until now lived in other areas of the city, moved to the Bhola bustee to be closer to their original home community (personal communications, August 11, 2014).

Above: the Bhola bustee.

The slum is located in Mirpur section 11.5, near a government-owned water channel. The channel creates a natural border on one side of the slum, and the main road on the other. Thus, the slum does not have much scope for expansion, and is now more than full, housing about 3000 people from more than 500 households (Mustafa, personal communication, August, 17, 2014; Palma et al., personal communication, October 12, 2014). To create more space, people are constructing an extra floor on top of their tin sheds, which makes the Bhola bustee more dense and crowded than other slums in Dhaka (ibid.) An aid worker from World Vision explained how he resents going to this
particular slum because of its density: «There is no air moving!» (ibid). The roads within the slum are very narrow, muddy, and filled with garbage.

The land is officially owned by the government Water Supply and Sewage Authority (WASA), the same agency that owns the channel. When the slum was first established, the Mirpur area was still to be constructed, and the first migrants simply claimed the land (Baby, personal communication, July 23, 2014). The slum dwellers were never given official permission to live here, however, and the slum is consequently of illegal status. As a result, people are in constant fear of eviction, and several of the respondents had themselves experienced such ousting, explaining that parts of the slum was evicted about seven-eight years ago. «The place where we are living here, the slum is a government property. This is the main problem» (Mustafa, personal communication, August 17, 2014).

At the same time, the many slum dwellers in Dhaka constitutes a significant political force, and evictions will often be condemned by the opposition to make political capital off the situation (Palma et al., personal communication, October 12, 2014). Therefore, the government may not want to remove the slum completely, but simply remind the slum dwellers of their illegal status on a regular basis. A consequence of not being politically acknowledged is that the slum is not connected to official infrastructure like sewage, gas, water, and electricity, permissions being difficult to obtain, also when requested through NGOs (ibid.). Illustrative is how the government cut the water pipe to the slum while conducting construction work in the area. As this pipe was illegally obtained, the slum dwellers could not claim a new one, and thus had to dig for a new water pipe to drain clean water from. This took them a full week during which they had to collect water from a nearby pond. Furthermore, the city corporation does not collect garbage from the slum, which is a big problem. According to World Vision sanitation is worse than in most other slums in Dhaka (ibid.). Countless inhabitants seemed to be bothered with different kinds of health problems, both related to nutrition, work injuries, and sanitation, and many of the smaller children had heat rashes covering their bodies.

In short, slum life is challenging in every aspect of daily routines. Problems range from having enough to eat and being able to take a shower in the morning, to privacy and health issues. The common determinator is a constant of too little income. «If I start with the problems, there is no ending to it» (Mustafa, personal communication, August 17, 2014).
The majority of the slum dwellers are working as laborers, garment workers, housemaids, and shop keepers. As will be described in more length below, the income sources in this area are deeply gendered, and lays the foundation of complex conflicts and negotiations within households both in the Bhola bustee and in the Bhola district.

Above: Bhola bustee and the WASA channel.
Chapter 6: Gendered opportunities and constraints

In the analysis that follows no clear distinction will be made between migrating, non-migrating, unmarried, and married women. Rather, the emphasis will be on the female narrative, which resonates across the different groups of women. At the same time, there are important distinctions among the groups, as will be discussed in chapter 7. This chapter starts out with a closer look at the gendered labor market in the Mirpur area, creating a pull factor for women to migrate. Next, the social costs of female migration, efficiently creating cultural constraints on potential future female migrants, will be laid out.

6.1. Gendered opportunities: A sex-segregated labor market

...migrants are positioned differently within labour markets and the labour demand is often gendered according to different economic sectors. Furthermore, migration implies economic and social costs and benefits for either men or women migrants, which adds to gendered migration patterns and outcomes (IOM, 2009, p. 9).

An interesting characteristic of the Mirpur area where the Bhola bustee is located is that the labor market is segregated by gender in a way that allows for a more stable income for women than for men. Women in the Bhola bustee are mostly occupied either as housemaids or garment workers. While the income of housemaids is also of importance, it is the presence of numerous garment factories that explains the favorable working opportunities for women in this area, as the wages are significantly higher in the garments sector than in traditional household work.

Importantly, the garment factories do not exclusively employ women, but prefer to do so. Earlier also more men worked in these factories, but this has changed due to harder competition in the labor marked. This increased competition can be explained by two developments in Mirpur. First, multiple garment factories in Mirpur have closed down in recent years. Slum dwellers explained that the closing of factories is due to a new government law which requires factories to relocate. It has not been possible to confirm the existence of a law explicitly requiring such relocations. There are other possible explanations for these shut-downs and relocations of factories, however. First, the international demand has decreased after the financial crisis. Probably more important is how investors are pulling out due to the inadequate working conditions revealed by the Rana Plaza collapse. In the aftermath of this accident, where more than 1100 people lost their lives and an estimate of 2500 were injured (Human Rights Watch, 2015, p. 96), the international community has
urged the Bangladeshi government to improve working conditions in the country. In 2013, the government responded by amending the Labor Act from 2006, imposing stricter safety measures. Also several private initiatives have been established, securing the inspection of 60% of the country’s factories for structure and fire safety (ILO, 2014). These inspections have led to the shutdown of numerous factories, with the consequence that employees are loosing their jobs. Several reports can be found in the media of factories in Mirpur shutting down due to unsafe working conditions (Clean Clothes Campaign, 2014; Al Jazeera America, 2014; Reuters, 2014). Importantly, the inspections conducted probably only account for some of the shutdowns. Many of the factories in Mirpur are not associated with specific brands, which means they are not registered with any of the larger monitoring initiatives. However, a general awareness-rising and the prospect of potential inspections in near future may have led factory owners to realize that their business is not sustainable. Consequently, they either choose to shut down their factories, or rebuild somewhere else where the business environment is better, for example in export processing zones in Savar and Gazipur (Jansen, personal communication, February 28, 2015).

In any case, factories shutting down, employing fewer workers, and preferring women over men is the reality of the slum dwellers in Mirpur. As a result, many men that used to work in the garments sector in this area have now lost their jobs. The reason for this, it was explained, is that women are easier to control, and will not complain over bad working conditions or low salaries: «[The employers] know women will not come forward to ask them for money. But the men will. That's why they work with the women» («Rafiq»).

Women are described as being able to sit still and work for long hours without complaint, accepting lower wages than men. If they complain they will loose both income and honor, few other income opportunities being available to women. This description of female workers reflect the general status and perception of women in society, where the social constructs of appropriate behavior of men and women are manifested in the labor market: Being reproduced at household level, they are spilled over into the labor market, which will further create a reinforcing effect. It can therefore be said that the labor market is «distinctively ‘domestic’ by virtue» (Carney and Watts, 1990, p. 217).

The ascription of secondary-earner status to women in many cultures gives them a competitive edge in the market for these jobs, a phenomenon described as 'the comparative advantage of women's disadvantage' (Aranda and Arizpe, 1981 quoted in Kabeer, 1991, p. 134).
Most of the men in the slum, on the other hand, work as day laborers, taking odd jobs wherever and whenever available. Typical work includes rickshaw pulling, cutting soil, construction work, garbage management, painting, and carpeting. When the slum was newly established, so was Mirpur as an expanding residential area. It was therefore great demand for work in construction, which employed many of the male slum dwellers. Today, the area is largely completed in terms of construction, and there is little or no work to find within this sector anymore. This is the second development causing more favorable working conditions for women relative to men in Mirpur: «We could work in building construction before. But now they have built their houses ... Now the opportunity for work is very low» («Rafiq»). Subsequently, most of the men that work as day laborers can now only find work between 10-15 days a month. «Farid» explained:

Most of the people have come here to Dhaka to work. If I offer to do the work for ten taka, someone else might charge them only five taka. The want for work is more. ... Previously there were more opportunities.

The fact that the garment factories prefer to employ women over men have two contrary effects. On the one hand, the fact that women are subjugated is the main reason why they are the preferred workers, and will contribute to reinforce this subjugation. At the same time, this gendered segregation of the labor market in Mirpur results in women often having a more stable income than men in the slum community. The salary for the men is higher per hour, but how many hours of work they are able to find varies from day to day and from week to week. Consequently, female income is of high importance to these households. Underscoring this point, Banks’ (2013) study of four slums in Dhaka showed that:

For households headed by unskilled labourers facing low wages and irregular work, female labour rates increase to around 65 per cent of households. If a household head is unemployed, the figure rises to nearly 70 per cent (Banks, 2013, p. 99).

This study found numerous cases where the female worker was the main income earner of the household, the other household members being located either in the slum or in the Bhola district. This reliance on female income is in striking disagreement with socially accepted gender norms, and is a source of conflict within the affected households as well as for the individuals within them. Nevertheless, facing an almost complete lack of income sources in the the Bhola district, the income opportunities that the garments industry provides creates an economic pull factor for women to migrate.
6.2. Social constraints on female migration

6.2.1. Women and work: Purdah, stigma and shame

There seems to be a consensus among researchers and development agents that jobs in the RGMs are perceived as ‘better’ than what has been available to women in Bangladesh before, which has typically been domestic work (Banks, 2013; Nasreen, personal communication, August 7, 2014; Jansen, personal communication, February 28, 2015). To work as a housemaid has been looked down upon for two reasons. First, it is not perceived as ‘real work’ because the women working in this sector are performing domestic household work, which is associated with women’s unpaid tasks at home. Thus, it is even more ‘domesticated’ than the garments sector. Illustrative of this is how the domestic work is ignored by the 2006 Labor Act (Jahan, 2014). Furthermore, and linked to this point, is that it is seen as unsafe, especially with concern to young girls working as in-house maids living with the family employing them. These girls are vulnerable as they are largely invisible, at the mercy of the family they are working for. There are many stories of girls being exploited both physically and mentally, being starved, underpaid, or sexually harassed (ibid.). A story told by one of the male respondents in the slum is illustrative:

I brought my niece here to work in someone’s house. She was locked in the bathroom and beaten with shoes. She was hurt badly in the head. She is still not well. ... They didn’t give us any money and nothing for her treatment («Rafiq»).

In this sense, the garments sector is perceived as safer than domestic work, making households more willing to give female members permission to work. Moreover, a job in garments is perceived more as a ‘real job’, being a place where also men work.

However, it was soon discovered how women working in the garments sector are highly stigmatized, in some ways even more so than the more traditional domestic workers. This indicates that migration and the income it brings may be associated with social costs. A recurrent explanation of why the garments sector is not suitable for women is simply that it will make girls who work here ‘go bad’. Investigating what was meant by ‘bad’, it became evident that the negative stigma attached to city girls is linked to the perception of them violating their purdah, which is in line with Amin (1997, p. 213): «Notions of shame and loss of status related to violating traditional female work patterns are inextricably connected to the institution of purdah».
Women who step out of the sphere of the home without a male guardian by their side break with the physical segregation of the sexes. This will lead them to be viewed with suspicion, their behavior closely scrutinized. Two accusations against women working outside the home emerged from the interviews, the first linked to practicalities while the other being of moral concern. First, it is perceived as problematic that women working long hours outside the home will not be given time to properly do their prayers, or be able to fully cover their bodies when doing physical labor work, both seen as important elements of upholding purdah. The other accusation is closely linked to the first one, as not being able to cover properly will lead to increased attention by male coworkers, leading to accusation of the women being immoral and ‘loose’. What seems to be at the core of the stigma attached to women working outside the home is that it requires women to interact with men on a regular basis.

While garment work is perceived as being a ‘real job’ in a workplace where also men work, this is also the crux of the problem with regard to female reputation, as it breaks with the physical segregation of women and men. The accusations of women working in garments differ from the stigma associated with domestic workers, who are still confined within the walls of the home, and are largely portrayed as victims rather than active violators of the purdah regime.

6.2.1.1. Dowry and devalued women

To be perceived as a ‘bad’ woman have consequences. One such consequence is the unmarried women’s decreasing value at the marriage market. The price of dowry is closely linked to reputation. Consequently, the stigma associated with being a ‘city girl’ may increase the amount of dowry to be paid to the groom’s family for acceptance of the marriage. As explained by, «Rasul» a fisherman in Syeddpur Union:

When people hear the girl works in garments the chance of marriage [in the village] drops, because there is a perception that those who work in garments are not well behaved. As people go from the village to big cities, they become ill mannered as the cities are quite different from the village (Focus group discussion, September 29, 2014).

The paradox is that for poor households, allowing their young girls to go to Dhaka for work is often the only way to afford dowry. The girls will then pay for this with their own income. At the same time, the stigma associated with taking up work often increase the dowry demanded from these girls, and may lead to a further impoverishment of their households. This will require them to stay
in Dhaka for a prolonged period of time, potentially further increasing their dowry as this rises with age (Huda, 2006, p. 255). Furthermore, the stigma may spill over to unmarried sisters, with the same effect.

Some respondents explained that in the village there is an agreement among poor households that dowry is not necessary. However, there seems to be a perception that higher dowry will give a ‘better’ husband. A ‘good’ husband was frequently explained to be a husband that would not only provide for his wife, but abstain from violence and allow his wife to keep in touch with, and even provide for, her parents also after marriage. In this sense it seems to be at least a perception that more dowry leads to a better position of the woman in relation to her husband and in-laws, as described in much literature (see for example Huda, 2006, p. 259). In short, failing to pay dowry seems to be perceived to increase the risk of disrespect for the bride and is therefore rendered undesirable. Thus, poor households may choose to send their daughters to the city with the associated stigma rather than to marry them off without a dowry. This explains why «Zarid’s» following statement reads somewhat contrary to «Rasul’s» explanation above: «the young girls who go to the garments are to make money and to get a good offer for marriage» (Focus group discussion, September 29, 2014).

6.2.1.2. Participating in stigma: Creating patterns of misinformation

The effect on dowry shows how female reputation and morality has important social, and even economic, effects. Consequently, it is important for migrating working women to uphold a positive reputation to the extent possible. One strategy used to achieve this is to distance themselves from others associated with the same stigma. Claiming to belong to the group of ‘proper’ women, they condemn other women who have failed in this regard and gone ‘bad’. «Nayla», a women who has herself worked both as a housemaid and in garments, expressed how she would never ask her sister, who is currently working as a housemaid, to start working in garments. The reason for this was that she may ‘go bad’ as other girls working here. The fact that she herself worked in garment was not relevant. The problem was the behavior of the other girls:

Aren’t we all girls? My shame is your shame. So if I walk around indecently dressed, someone will see me and think the same of all girls ... Then what is the difference between if he said it about her or if he said it about me? ... So we feel angry at her. If she didn’t go around like that, the man wouldn’t have said anything.
«Farzana», a young garment worker in Dhaka, described how it is important for her to uphold a positive reputation in the village, regardless of how she feels about her situation. She explained that she is afraid of the boys living next door, as they call on her when she passes by. If she complains, however, it will indicate that she has talked to these boys, which she is not supposed to do. To avoid gaining a bad reputation, she therefore keeps it to herself:

I don’t like this. But I can’t just tell this to everyone. ... I’m scared to tell anyone because I will feel ashamed and they might say bad things about me. ... They’ll say ‘the girl has turned bad. Those boys were good before she came’. So I’m not able to say anything («Farzana»).

«Farzana» explained how it is of importance to her that her guardian, an older woman being a friend of her family, thinks well of her. Similarly, «Nasreen» revealed how she had kept her work a secret not to gain a bad reputation in her home village:

I used to work in Dhaka in a sweater factory. My husband and my in-law parents didn’t know. So I came back from work before they knew, because if they knew they might feel bad, or might think something bad about me, people may say bad things. So I returned due to my self respect .... They all thought I was in Dhaka studying ... Only my own family, my brother, my sister and my parents knew that I used to work in a sweater factory in Dhaka (Focus group discussion, September 27-28, 2014).

In short, it is of importance to migrants to uphold a positive image of their situation before their home communities, especially so when links to the village are maintained. Such efforts to uphold a positive image cover actual conditions and hardships of the migrants, with the potential consequence of further deepening the costs that migration entails. Demonstrating this, when asked about working conditions most girls said that they liked it or that it is ‘good’ or ‘fine’, often with a little shrug, in sharp contrast to the harsh working conditions widely described in literature. As, «Anika», a young garment worker in Dhaka said when asked about the visits to her home village: «I can’t say it’s not nice, so I said it’s nice».

Confirmed also through the field visits in the Bhola district, such efforts to uphold a good reputation leads to patterns of misinformation in the Bhola community. Although skeptical of women stepping out of their given gender roles, people seemed to have a more positive perception of living conditions in Dhaka than the accounts given by migrants in the Bhola bustee. Another illustrative example is the misinformation with regard to income, both for women and men. When asked what they had expected to earn before leaving their village, migrants tended to answer a number three to
four times higher than their actual salary. This high number was also reported by villagers when asked what people in Dhaka earn.

6.2.3. The stigma of men

Importantly, purdah is not a concept targeting only women, but is a relational social construct regulating specific responsibilities and appropriate behavior for both men and women. Consequently, the stigmatization of working women has a spill-over effect on their male household members.

A man’s main responsibility is to provide for his household. This has two different but interrelated meanings. First, he is responsible for earning an income to cover his household’s material needs. Second, he is required to protect children and the female members of the household. When a woman takes up wage work it indicates that her male guardian has failed in providing for her in one or both of these terms, signalizing that he has failed to fulfill his responsibilities as a man. The disapproval by men of women’s participation in wage work seems to be due to this stigma, rather than a disbelief that women can contribute to the family’s well-being. In fact, several of the male respondents expressed both an understanding for and an appreciation of women working, acknowledging their contribution. This finding is confirmed through similar findings by UN Women Bangladesh (Haider, personal communication, July 21, 2014).

If she can earn money, it will help us pay the rent and overall it will benefit us («Reaj»).

My oldest sister ... used to bear the whole expense of the household. ... Her life was very painful. She is still struggling ... I am really grateful («Habib»).

However, they feel bad that the women in their households have to work: «I felt bad that my little sister had to work. I am affectionate to my sister. I thought I would be able to maintain the family on my own... I am forced to [let her work]» («Tafsiq»). Similar to how «Nayla» distanced herself from other working women, «Tafsiq» distances himself from other men that allow their women to work: «It depends on how much they love them ... I obviously felt bad that she still has to work though I am here». Further demonstrating such distancing is how male respondents talked about other men, often deemed as ‘no good’ and not hard working enough. In explanation of why his sister has to work, «Rafiq» described his brother in law in the following way: «He’s like a vagabond. Sometimes, he can manage to earn and sometimes he cannot». The men seek to uphold a
positive image of their moral character, justifying own behavior while dismissing seemingly similar actions by others.

From the interviews it becomes clear that it is the second meaning of purdah, that of protection, which preoccupy men the most. In allowing their women to work, they are implicitly allowing them to interact with unknown men (‘porpurush’) in ways that is not perceived as appropriate. By allowing such interaction, they have not only failed to provide the women with the material assets required, but have fundamentally failed at protecting them from the dangers of the outside world, which lays at the core of the reasoning for purdah. As «Nahar», a female dweller, explained: «[My husband] doesn’t like that I go and sit in the corner of the road and people see and can hurt me». This is in line with the reasoning of Turner et al. (2008):

The ability to provide for one’s family and fulfill obligations to one’s culture is central to a person’s self-confidence, self-esteem, and feelings of worthiness. When this ability is denied, it can lead to frustration, helplessness, and loss of self-respect that can last an entire lifetime and affect a whole family or community (Turner et al., 2008).

A concern with stigma related to failure of responsibilities was evident among male respondents. Interestingly, «Faisul», a male slum dweller, explained how men would often discuss their own work, but avoid the topic of their working wives: «No we don’t share much on this ... Mostly they do not want their wives to go out and work. They might be taunted». During the focus group discussion with fishermen in Bhola, it was similarly noted:

A lot of people talk about that the woman left the family to work in garments. That’s quite humiliating for a man ... If I have an argument with my friend, they instantly say that your wife has left you. Now, that is very shameful for me («Rasul»).

... it’s better to die than to hear this («Nasif»).

Generally, the potential prospect of women going to Dhaka to work seems to be perceived as a threat by men in Bhola: «If we can’t feed them they will go to their father’s house or they will leave us for going to Dhaka to work in garments. Or they will divorce us» («Rasul»). They explained how they felt terrible about this, expressing an understanding of the women’s frustration. At the same time, they communicated that women fail to sympathize with the difficult situation of their husbands.
Another expression of such shame from being unable to provide for the household was expressed by the father of two garment workers. «Sharif» emphasized how his daughters liked their work, and that it was their own decision to do so. It seemed to be important to him to get across that he had in no way pushed them to work, at the same time expressing despair that his poverty had forced them to such a decision. It is in other words important to men with female working household members to emphasize that they did not encourage this behavior, and did their best to prevent it. First, it is important to emphasize that they did not ask the women for help. Second it is important to show that they feel bad that they cannot protect them. Thus, the stigma facing men when female household members take up wage work give them an incentive to disapprove of their wives and daughters doing so. Since persisting gender norms require women to obtain permission from their male guardian, male honor creates a substantial constraining factor for women who wish to enter the labor force.

6.2.4. The triple burden of women

Research on the gendered impact on migration often highlights how the absence of men will leave women left behind with greater burdens, often having to compensate for men’s insufficient income. This seems also to be true for women that migrate for wage work. They will still have the full responsibility to look after the house and potential children, creating a double workload. Female respondents in the slum expressed dissatisfaction with this increased burden. The young garment worker «Nasrin», for example, expressed frustration with how she as a woman gets less sleep than a man because she has more duties:

> Men don’t get sick in the same way and they don’t have to come and work at home. They go to work and eat. ... All the problems are for women: we need to cook and serve, wake up early in the morning, work. ... [Women] go to bed at midnight or 1 am, and then need to wake up at 3 or 4 am to cook. That’s why they feel sick («Nasrin»).

Some of the women accused their men of being lazy, drinking tea and gossip while waiting for work to show up. To the men, on the other hand, it seemed unthinkable to help share this burden with female household members. Rather, they would explain how this is no problem, because the women are able to do both:
My wife goes to work at 8 am. Before going to work she does the dishes and other household tasks. She comes back at 2 pm and does the rest of it. Sometimes when my daughter comes back from the Madrasa, if she gets time, she also helps her («Abdul»).

As taking care of the home is at the core of female responsibilities, men will require an assurance that wage work will not compromise such tasks before permitting their women to earn a wage: «I told her that if she can manage to work, then she should» («Reaj»). When adding the social stigma to this double burden, the women in question are arguably not facing a double, but a triple burden when taking up wage work. Thus, this is not something they will take on lightly.

To sum up this chapter, gender influences both opportunities for income, as well as constraints for utilizing such opportunities. While income opportunities in garments work creates a pull factor, cultural norms for appropriate behavior for men and women create constraints on this opportunity. First it stigmatizes women as well as their other household members, and will increase dowry costs for unmarried women. Furthermore, the gendered division within the household does not change upon women working, in sum creating a triple burden for women.
Chapter 7: Motivations and perceived adaptive capacity

This chapter analyzes how the gendered opportunities and constraints laid out in the previous chapter affect potential female migrant’s perceptions of risks and adaptive options. How these are perceived will arguably affect the women’s perceived adaptive capacities and subsequent motivations of how to respond to environmental stressors and loss of livelihoods. Furthermore, also how men perceive the same risks and opportunities will affect whether they allow female household members to work.

7.1. Risk appraisals: Thresholds for female migration

In thought of the large and multiple social costs associated with female migration, it does not seem that the pull factor that garment work creates can sufficiently explain what makes women migrate from the Bhola district. It seems that also strong push factors are needed. Former studies show how the participation in the workforce by Bangladeshi women vary by class: the poorest segment of society have the highest rate of working women. In the lower middle class women are most often at home, the family distancing itself from the poorer segment by showing that their women do not have to work. In the upper middle class, however, a larger number of women work, due to this class’ higher education and more secular values (Kabeer, 2011, p. 19). According to these findings it is not surprising to find working women among the poor population of a Dhaka slum. The poorest segment of the population simply cannot afford to keep their women at home. This indicates that a lower economic threshold does exist that will push women into wage work.

According to the socio-cognitive model laid out in chapter 3, before an individual evaluates potential routes for adaptation, he or she will carry out a ‘risk-appraisal’ - evaluating the likelihood and magnitude of a threat. In line with this model, it seems that women only consider migration when they perceive the risk of men not being able to provide for the household as very likely and with grave consequences- so grave that they perceive it as necessary to take action. Thus, when the household is on the verge of subsistence levels, some women break out of their given gender roles and do what they can to help their family adapt.

As the man is the one responsible for providing income it is likely that environmental stressors, through negatively affecting livelihoods, will drive male migration before female migration. Thus, female migration from the Bhola district is less directly linked to environmental stress than male migration, and is rather a consequence of lack of male income. This finding is supported by Naved
et al. (2001), who found that rather than being drawn by new opportunities, young female garment workers were migrating when there was a shortage of adult males to support their household. From this it was concluded that female migration is a «response to lack of resources» (Naved et al. 2001, p. 95).

Confirming this, the young female migrants often explained how they had lost their father and hence the main income earner of the family. Those who did have a brother explained that his income alone was not enough to provide for the family. It seemed that the lack of brother’s was perceived as a major problem, pushing young girls to migrate to provide for their household: «If we had brothers, neither of us would have to live like this ... We will have to become like brothers» («Nasrin»). Similarly, married women in the slum often accompany their husband in the labor force as his income is simply not enough:

You can’t get by on one person’s work and men don’t always get jobs («Aleya»).

By husband working alone can’t do it («Nahar»).

As long as my brothers were working, I sat at home. Now my brothers don’t have work, so I have to do it myself («Adila»).

Consequently, it seems that the economic pull factor provided by income opportunities in Mirpur needs to be coupled with strong economic push factors in the village to result in female migration. Importantly, this economic threshold should not be understood in monetary terms, but rather through the (non)existence of livelihoods. The loss is often literal, as river erosion will often take away both house, land, and animals, ripping away households’ entire basis for living.

Since women have to weigh migration opportunities against larger social costs than men, a larger risk may be needed before women perceive it as sufficient for action. If this holds, it means that under similar circumstances women will wait longer to migrate than men.

### 7.2. Adaptation appraisals: Negotiating structures

It becomes clear that female migration is mediated through cultural constraints and economic incentives. Lack of income opportunities for women in the village combined with new income opportunities in the city creates an economic incentive to move. When livelihoods are lost, this may
create a strong enough push factor to make women find justifications for breaking with the cultural constraints of purdah. This is suggested also by Kabeer:

In the context of Bangladesh, where female factory employment would still be regarded as a cultural anomaly, economic need may be considered ... the only reason compelling enough to justify a break with purdah norms (Kabeer, 1991, p. 143).

From the field work it does not seem that this response should be understood as an automatic process, however. That is, not all women in livelihood-stressed households migrate. Arguably, in this situation of a strong need for livelihood diversification strategies but faced with strong cultural constraints, the final choice will likely be an outcome of negotiations both within a household and at the individual level. A justification for migration is sought, based on perceptions of costs, likely outcomes, and own role and agency. Furthermore, it should be noted that although the model proposed by Grothmann and Patt understands risk-appraisal to be carried out prior to the adaptation appraisal, the reality is probably that the two are carried out somewhat simultaneously, potential adaption strategies being evaluated against perceived risks. If the risk is perceived as growing, so is the likelihood of migration being perceived as a real alternative for action.

7.2.1. Female initiative

By most calculations, illiterate landless rural women in Bangladesh are situated at the bottom of all conceivable social, economic, and political hierarchies, and their material deprivation is reinforced by their subjection to strict cultural and legal codes of conduct (Shehabuddin, 2008, p. 4).

As the quote above suggests, it was assumed that female migrants would in some way or the other have been ‘sent’ by their families. This assumptions stems from the norm that women need approval from their male guardians for leaving the home. Despite this fact, the assumption of ‘sending families’ did not hold. With only a few exceptions, the female respondents were initiative takers who had convinced often skeptical family members to let them go, or to migrate with them. This finding is supported by Kabeer in her study of migrant garment workers. She notes it as striking how an overwhelming majority of female migrant garment workers had themselves taken the initiative to move for work (Kabeer, 1991, p. 142). This female agency exercised in the migration process is probably best understood against the backdrop of the male stigma associated with wage earning female family members. This leaves the initiative with the women in question simply because men will not ask their women to work.
I forcibly came. I told them a lot of things to make them understand («Anika»).

I decided on my own. ... My father said: ‘No, we have raised you this far. We are going to arrange your marriage’. I said, ‘No, I don’t want to get married, I want to work’. They said, ‘You don’t need to work’ ... Then I said I would do it myself. They asked me how I would get to Dhaka. I had a mobile phone and told them I would sell it and get money. Then I sold the phone and got money from that («Seema»).

My father said, ‘No matter how hard it gets, I will be able to feed you.’ And I said, ‘There is no need to suffer so much to make ends meet. There are two younger brothers and they’re getting bigger. I’ll go and I’ll live there and send you money every month.’ («Naureen»).

Importantly, such agency should not be ascribed to only independently migrating women. Also married women exercise strong agency in the migration process, although less visible. For example, it is not uncommon that the initiative for migration is taken by the wife, rather than the conventional conception that this decision is always taken exclusively by the husband. This was confirmed by a substantial share of the male respondents, who explained how it had been a female household member who had first suggested that the household should migrate, being both mothers, sisters and wives. In line with this narrative, the slum leader Monira explained how it is not uncommon that girls who go back to their village for marriage return to the city with their husband to continue working.

I said, ‘I won’t stay here, I am going to go to Dhaka so I can feed my kids. If I need to, I will go to work myself so we can eat.’ I said that and made him understand, and we came [to Dhaka] («Nahar»).

7.2.2. Dependence on men questioned by faltering livelihoods

Such female initiative suggest that how the alternative of migration is perceived by the women themselves is central. Interestingly, the women are challenging the authority of their male guardians, and it is of interest to investigate what make them justify to do so.

As has been shown above, women having to earn for a living is associated with male stigma and indicates failure on the man’s behalf. This creates incentives for men not to approve of women in their households to take up such work. However, the fact that they have failed to fulfill their responsibilities as men, seems to make women respect them less, resulting in them being less willing to comply with the men’s demands. This creates situations of conflict within the household:
Our spouse expects a lot from us, if we can’t give them anything they are unhappy with us. There are times when we end up fighting because of frustration («Nasif»).

Amongst us 50% of men have problems with their spouse. Because we can’t get them what they want («Fahim»).

It just happens due to poverty or scarcity («Alam»).

Correspondingly, several of the female respondents expressed frustration, and sometimes anger, toward their male guardians, for several interrelated reasons. First, they expressed frustration with the men’s lacking income, something which sometimes lead to accusations of laziness, especially so in the Bhola bustee. This frustration is further closely linked to the women’s dependence on men, as «Raumana», a female respondent in Bhola expressed it: «if the husband doesn’t do anything one day our lives stop». Second, female respondents expressed how it is difficult to tolerate the expectation that they will sit passively and watch the poverty affecting their household: «I wanted to go to Dhaka for work. I wanted to earn a wage and eat. I was just sitting» («Rayhana»). Thus, frustration was expressed with men keeping them out of work when this is perceived to be the only option to increase the income of the household:

Even if your husband says no, you will go [to work]?
Yes, I will go. ... If I listen to everything he says, I won’t be able to raise my children. ... I would listen to him if he said no if he brought home some money or some food. ... But he doesn’t do that. If he doesn’t do it then I need to do it myself. («Nayla»)

7.2.3. Justifications

How then, is migration for wage work justified by the women who chose to utilize this option? From the discussion above, it becomes clear that men failing to fulfill their responsibilities as income earners cause women also to forsake theirs. The women often expressed anger in this regard, as they do perceive their purdah as valuable, being closely linked to their identity and honor. At the same time, it also functions as a justification for women to step out of the home - as their men left them with little other option. Using such hardship to justify their actions, they seem to have found a pragmatic balance between purdah and the reality of their situation:

Staying under purdah is very good, but you can’t sit back and only think about purdah and not do anything. You have to do purdah as well as look at what is going on and what you can do. So you have to maintain Allah’s rules and also have to lead you life («Jameela», Focus group discussion September 27-28, 2014).
If you do [purdah] then you can stay well after death but if you only think about after death then you have to suffer in this life («Tahera», ibid.).

Similar to the reasoning of men’s protection of women, women themselves often justify their migration for wage work through referring to their responsibilities toward household members that are more vulnerable than themselves. For unmarried women this will typically be parents or younger siblings, while for married women to provide for their children seems to be the first concern. It can thus be argued that women and men alike use a reasoning of protection to justify their decision to migrate for wage work. Kabeer found similar reasonings in her study: «cultural norms about altruistic mothers and dutiful daughters were given new meanings in order to justify the break with conventions about 'women's place'» (Kabeer, 1991, p. 154).

For example, «Anika», a young garment worker, explained how she worked so she could stand with her «head held high», referring to the importance of supporting her younger siblings. This is interesting in thought of the negative stigma associated with such work. It seems that it is important to these women to be able to contribute, and that despite everything this is also a source of pride. Another young garment worker said: «We were in hardship so I worked. I think well of myself. I can work and eat, that’s a virtue» («Israt»). Instead of being liabilities (Kabeer et al., 2011; Afsar, personal communication, August 10, 2014) they can help their households do better either by providing for their parents; pay for their siblings education; save up for their own dowry so that their parents will not have to; or to secure their children’s education. «Nasrin» explained how her husband did not want her to work, but that being a passive observer to her own life was simply not possible for her: «He says ‘You don’t need to work. You can die without working’ but my heart says I need to do something and bring something home».

Some of the younger female respondents seemed also the be questioning the system of stigma in which they are pinned. Without questioning gender roles or purdah per se, the words of a young garment worker in response to the gossip of the villagers are illustrative:

But just because they say it doesn’t mean I have to listen. ... Saying bad things about a girl is wrong. They should think, ‘I also have a daughter. The way my daughter is, others’ daughters are the same’ («Naureen»).

7.2.4. Migrants and non-migrants: Frustration with the greedy others
At the same time, such justifications are contested by women not migrating. During the focus group discussion in Bhola with women having no connections to the garments sector, a surprising level of anger was expressed toward migrating women, one respondent bursting out: «We hate the garments!». The other respondents expressed strong-felt agreement. The group associated clear negative characteristics to women migrating for work, explaining how working long hours in the same room as men is evidence of them being ‘loose’. They explained how such women are ‘greedy’, thinking about themselves rather than their families’ reputation. Because it is difficult for them to come back home to marry they are also «stealing the young boys that works there».

You know the girls who are greedy, who see that there is money in the garments, they go ... They kick their husband and family and go to work there for money ... And they don’t care about the respect of own or even of their family ...

This anger may have two different but interrelated explanations. First, as shown by «Nayla» above, the inappropriate behavior of other women feels like an attack on own self-respect. However, the women in this group discussion did not seem to be as concerned with the distancing from such shame as the slum dwelling women. In chapter 5 it was shown how migrants are perceived as ‘opportunistic but desperate’. In view of this, a possible explanation is that the non-migrating women were angry with the migrating women for taking such an opportunity when they are themselves equally distressed. This is especially evident in the description of women migrating as ‘greedy’.

If those ... girls maintain the purdah rules properly they wouldn’t have gone there («Rehana»)

I don’t go because I care for my self respect («Nayla»).

We don’t want, or to think about, to work in the garments. We are happy whatever our husband earns. We would never go to garments for work («Nastrat»).

We don’t need garments work. We will not go and we don’t wish to send our kids to the garments for work. We are happy with our husband earning whatever that is. If he is earning 1 taka we are happy with that. We understand that 1 taka is 1 million taka for us («Nastrat»).

This resonates also with the remark by a male slum dweller that many would perceive it as better to starve than to send their women to work. Importantly, the non-migrating women expressed similar anger and distress about their situation as the migrating women, calling even for increased working opportunities for women in the village so that they can contribute to their household without
compromising their family’s reputation. Furthermore, also these women reported to have sick husbands not earning enough. «Every house has sick people but can’t do anything because they don’t have any money» («Nayla»). Still, they did not reach the same conclusion as the women that chose to migrate. Rather, the rationale seemed to be that it is their responsibility as women to keep the household together no matter what. If a woman migrates it would symbolize a breakdown of the household: «Women are responsible for maintaining the family with husband’s little income», «Nayla» said. The group further reasoned explained the duties as a wife in the following way: «Maintain purdah properly and depend on Allah for our life and livelihood. Don’t fight with our husbands if they are not able to earn much money». The reasoning of these women consequently dismisses the notion that female migration is an automatic function of lack of male income earners although it seems an important push factor for those who do migrate.

7.2.5. The importance of the life cycle

This leads to the next point, which is that a clear link can be found between patterns of migration and the life cycle of the individuals. This is not surprising, and is found also in other studies, where it is shown that married women is the group least likely to migrate (Afsar, 1994; Massey et al. 2006; Jungehülsing, 2010). Both female focus group discussions were held with married women, one with non-migrants and one with women who had returned from work in the cities upon marriage. The returned migrants explained that although they wished to continue working, marriage and child bearing had made this impossible. Especially the responsibility to look after the children is at the core of female responsibilities, and cannot in any way be escaped. Some women explained how they had left their children with their mothers in law, but had had to come back once something happened, usually the mother in law becoming sick or the feeling that the children were not well enough looked after. Furthermore, leaving her children behind, a woman would be deemed a ‘bad mother’. «People humiliate the children by saying that ‘your mother has left you’» («Nasif»). As a result, once children are involved it is more common for the whole household to migrate: «So basically nobody leaves their children behind here. If they move to Dhaka they all go along» («Alam»). As has already been shown, this is not to say that married women do not exercise agency.

Frequent disruptions to female labour due to lifecycle changes such as pregnancy, child care or daughters being sent for marriage acts as further constraints on the ability of households to use female labour mobilization as a strategy for advancement (Banks, 2013, p. 100).
According to Banks (2013, p. 103), the lesser share of wage earning women among the married group, can be explained by degree of perceived threat to own honor. A wage earning wife is seen as a larger threat to male power than a wage earning daughter, making male head of households more likely to approve of daughters taking up wage work than wives. Without the consent of the husband, married women have few other options than to stay, a situation in which few married women find migration a viable option.

7.4. Motivations and perceived adaptive capacity

In sum, the issue of women and work is highly contested in the Bhola community. Purdah is highly valued, and it is important to both men and the women themselves to be able to uphold this to the extent possible. Thus, Papanek’s notion still holds when arguing that: «The status of women in a purdah society is a characteristic of major importance of the entire social system, and must be confronted at almost every turn» (Papanek, 1964, p. 160).

This is a root of conflict among household members. Importantly, it seems also to be causing an inner conflict. At the one hand, women do generally not wish to migrate, taking on a double work load, forsaking their purdah and facing the stigma that follows. At the same time, they have a strong wish to do so in order to help their families, and to be able to live a better life. «Seema», for example, said «I was happy to leave the village and come to Dhaka city» but thereafter explaining: «I have a lot of sorrows. I feel very bad because if my father was alive, I wouldn’t be working». Men on the other hand, acknowledge the contribution of women but feel both threatened and ashamed when women take up wage work. At the same time, they feel guilt when they are unable to provide for and protect their female household members.

The findings of this study indicate that the perceived adaptation efficacy for potential female migrants is relatively high, as the gendered labor market in Mirpur offers more stabile income opportunities for women than men. At the same time, when weighted against the perceived costs attached to such migration, the relative achievements from female migration diminishes. This is furthermore closely linked to the perceived efficacy of own migration, and for the latter to be considered a viable option, justification is needed. It is only when it can be justified as contributing to the achievement of something else of value, as for example providing for and protecting other family members, that migration seem to be perceived as valuable and respectable, at the very least by the migrant herself.
Furthermore, it should be noted that the ability to go ultimately relies on the male guardian. Although some respondents had ran away from home for various reasons, the more common story was that male resistance had to be overcome. In line with Banks’ findings, it generally seems that to disrespect the words of your father is seen as less grave than to disrespect your husband. It was furthermore underlined by most respondents that if their parents or husbands said ‘no’ and meant it, there was not much to be done. However, they would often add «but they cannot say no», indicating that the threshold in question will be perceived to exist also by male household members. As both female and male respondents would so often repeat: «there is no other solution». In the words of Banks: «Endemic insecurity has led to an environment in which patriarchal ideologies are forced to take a back seat» (Banks, 2013, p. 99).

In sum, Grothmann and Patt seems to be right in their argument that motivations and perceived adaptive capacity can heavily influence adaptive behavior, and need to be taken into consideration for an understanding for how to better facilitate proactive adaptation. Values and norms held by the community have an important say in individual’s decision making. Especially the notion of ‘self-respect’ is of outmost importance in this case, and is not easily given up for monetary achievements. Indeed, sometimes the adaptation appraisal will conclude that moral reputation is of more value. Importantly, the focus should not be solely on the decision itself. Also the process through which the decision is taken is of importance, as internal struggle over what to do may drag out and delay potential adaptive behavior. Capturing this process, the argument of the study thus far can be summarized in the model on the next page.
Chapter 8: Implications for adaptation

Picking up the thread from the previous chapter, this chapter will discuss what impacts the gendered influence on risk and adaptation appraisals have on the utilization and efficiency of migration as an adaption strategy to environmental stressors.

8.1. Utilization: The ability to adapt

The first thing to note is how gendered thresholds for risk appraisals seems to make women wait longer than men to migrate for improvement of the household’s livelihoods. This has negative implications for adaptation as it will render households with more female household members more vulnerable to environmental stress.

First, postponing the migration decision creates a risk that drivers for migration will turn into limits, for example when the household’s assets are taken away by river bank erosion before migration is undertaken. Second, if migration is delayed until there is no other option left but to do so, there is a risk that the migration is carried out in a less planned manner. Several female respondents explained how they had lived on the streets of Dhaka for some time before finding their way to the Bhola bustee. In the cases where women do not have the support of their household upon migrating, it is possible that they are also less able to utilize migration networks that the household would otherwise draw support from. In short, that women wait to migrate will expose them to greater risks both at home and in the destination area.

One of the reasons why women wait longer to migrate, especially the younger girls, is that they are waiting to find someone to travel with. Because it is regarded as unsafe for women to travel to Dhaka alone, some women wait for a substantial amount of time also after they have made the decision to migrate. For example, «Anika» explained how she waited in the village for three years before she could travel with a neighbor. Delay in migration has implications for the understanding of trapped populations, and raises the question of how this should be understood in relation to time. The term ‘trapped’ sounds somewhat static, but could arguably be understood to work in a more dynamic manner. That women wait for years to migrate because of gender-related constraints shows that they may be temporarily trapped, until an opportunity to migrate emerges.

Importantly, not all women will migrate although facing the same situation of livelihood stress. The findings of this study indicate that there may be a significant number of trapped women in the
Bhola district. The informal settlements alongside the embankments indicate a significant trapped population in the area, entire households being displaced. However, women are trapped also in another sense. They are not only trapped in monetary terms, but also culturally within the walls of their home. As one of the returned garment workers expressed: «Girls stay in the house as if they stay in jail» («Nasreen»). The returned female migrants explained how they left the village to work in Dhaka before marriage, and worked there until their family told them it was time for them to come home and marry. Several had to come back against their will, and wished to go back to contribute to the income of both their own household as well as provide for their parents, but were not allowed by their families to do so. Faced with the responsibilities of house and children, combined with being constantly reminded to take care of their self-respect, migration, an action «which they could perform physically» becomes to be perceived «normatively as impossible» (Grothmann and Patt, 2005: 202). Still, it was a clear consensus in the focus group discussion with returned female garment workers that: «Every woman wants to go out of the house and go for work in Dhaka».

We see that we don’t have sufficient income, but if we wish to go to work and try to help, our husbands say you can’t go anywhere without my permission. Listening to them we stay back home in scarcity (Focus group discussion, .

*You said when you lived in the village you couldn’t work because there were no jobs. Do you know if this is a problem many other women face?*

Many women, many. They live in a lot of hardship in the village («Rayhana»).

### 8.2. Outcome, efficiency, and sustainability

The next question is how gender affects the efficiency of migration as an adaptation strategy to environmental stressors. When asked whether they thought it was a good decision to migrate, the very majority of migrants respondents said they thought so. When asked about remittances, however, a surprisingly high portion of the respondents complained that they did not earn enough to send sufficient remittances back, sometimes not at all.

Although responses of male and female respondents were similar in this regard, an important difference has to be noted. Among the unmarried garment girls, one of the rationales for migrating is often to save up for their dowry in addition to sending remittances home. However, as migrants earn less than planned for, «Nasrin», for example, explained that after sending remittances home and paying for own food, there is nothing left to save:
My parents are sick so they can’t earn a wage. Then I will need to get married too. So let’s see how many more years I will have to stay here. Let’s see if I can save some money. That’s the thing: I can’t save any money from my work. [And] it costs a lot to marry a girl («Nasrin»).

The fact that migrants are earning substantially less than expected upon migration has severe negative effects on their own well-being as well as their households which are often dependent on their remittances. The burden of dowry contributes negatively to this situation.

Another important point with regard to sustainability and female migration is the fact that many women are not allowed to continue to send remittances to their natal families after marriage. This causes some women to delay marriage in order to continue to provide for their families, further reinforcing their role as a ‘brother’. Nevertheless, female migration for remittances will often be more short-termed than is the case for male migrants, leading to an increase of the vulnerability of the household in question. «Malik» recalled from his childhood that «when they got married, we faced poverty even more», referring to his older sisters who used to earn an income for the household. This point is connected to the discussion of dowry as laid out earlier. It seems to be of outmost importance to female respondents to get a husband that will allow them to continue to provide for their parents. This connects dowry and sustainability of adaptation tools, as increased dowry is perceived to increase the chances of a ‘good’ husband, that will allow them to do so.

The fact that income opportunities are more stabile for women than men in the destination area would from a purely economic perspective be an argument in favor of more women migrating for wage work in stead of men. However, when considering the social costs, and their subsequent negative economic effects, the picture changes. In conclusion, female migration for wage work as an adaptation strategy to lost livelihoods seems to be less efficient relative to male migration. It is important to note that this should not be read as female migration being of marginal importance. Indeed, it has been shown that it is of great importance. However, the outcome is suboptimal.

8.3. Successful adaptation?

Despite these problems, it seemed to be a consensus that the decision to move was the right decision. It was rarely reported that another decision would have been better. This is also confirmed by the fact that returned migrating women wished to go back to Dhaka. The reason for this was
often explained to be food security, being higher in the slum than in the village. Many respondents explained how they had often had only one meal a day back in the village while in the slum they were able to eat three times a day, and that this was an important improvement in their lives:

Here, I can at least raise my children. If I went back home, I wouldn’t be able to give them any food («Nahar»).

Of course (migrating) was a good thing. Before, I lived in the village and couldn’t eat. Now, I have worked in garments. I have raised my children. I am well myself («Rayhana»).

However, while migration allows individuals and households to cope with immediate poverty, migration will for many mean to leave one set of problems behind for a new set in the destination area. Respondents explained how rather than having improved their lives considerably, it was the only reasonable decision they could make. This perception was similar among the male and female respondents. Important to note in this regard is the declining income opportunities in Mirpur, both for men and women. Construction work is less demanded and garment factories are shutting down. Some people have already moved from Mirpur to Savar and Gazipur, relocating with the factories.

This calls into question how to label this migration. It has clearly helped the households and individuals in question overcome challenges posed by environmental stressors, providing an alternative income source when livelihoods are lost. At the same time, the situation of the slum dwellers, and the fact that they are often not able to save up money makes it clear that migration have by no means lifted the households out of poverty but rather functions as a buffer against food insecurity. As «Reaj» expressed it: «It was a good decision but I couldn’t find a good opportunity».

Second, there are clear elements of forced mobility in the migration patterns between Bhola and Dhaka, which further complicates the view of migration as an adaptation strategy. This raises ethical questions of whether it is adequate to label migration a successful adaptation strategy when the migrants in question move from one disadvantaged situation to another. How much improvement qualifies?

It has to be acknowledged that the living conditions in the Bhola bustee are unsatisfactory and the working conditions harsh, both for men and women. Men often have no other option but to take jobs in physically heavy labor, from which they have to retire at a relatively early age. There were several stories of poor health preventing men in the slum from being able to pull a rickshaw, which
is often portrayed as the ultimate safety-net: ‘you can always pull a rickshaw’. Moreover, working accidents across all types of day labor jobs are not uncommon, and will often leave the main income earner of the family unable to provide any further income (this is discussed in length by Chambers, 1989, p. 37). Furthermore, a job in garments means long working hours with few breaks and harassment from supervisors. In agreement with Tacoli and Mabala:

while there is no doubt that remittances reduce vulnerability and increase resilience in sending households – which may be crucial in the context of climate change – if they come from exploitative, insecure work ... this poses an important ethical question (Tacoli and Mabala, 2010, p. 394).

In terms of adjusting to an interrupting event, and the fact that such migration seems crucial to the households in question, migration from Bhola to Dhaka can be understood as an adaptive measure. It is, however, questionable whether one should label an adaptation strategy as successful when it renders disadvantaged population groups only marginally better off than before adaptive measures were taken.

8.3.1. The next generation

When evaluating the outcome and adaptive potential of migration strategies, it is not only unclear when such strategies should be deemed successful, but also who strategies are for and who they are carried out by (Uddin, personal communication, 22 July, 2014). Many respondents, both migrants and non-migrants, expressed both grief and fear that their younger household members, either younger siblings or children, would suffer the way they have done. An important reason for migrating was to ensure their future, although it often proved difficult to do so. To ensure the education of younger household members was the mentioned by almost all respondents as being the most important goal when asked about their future. A female slum dweller responded the following way: «I have never cried about my own future. We cry because our children have to be like us» («Adila»). Many young migrants, girls and boys alike, give up on their education to migrate to urban areas to send money back to their families. Being largely unskilled, they get trapped in a cycle of low-income earning activities in insecure working environments. At the same time, a goal is often to help ensure the education of other siblings, which may in the longer-term help ensure a more sustainable future for the household altogether. Whether this is a realistic prediction of the future is however difficult to answer, keeping in mind the difficulties of poor candidates to enter the skilled labor market. Improvement in these conditions is closely linked to the overall development
of Bangladesh as a country, both in economic and political terms, and cannot be addressed in isolation. «Employment have to be generated. ... If there was employment here nobody would migrate to live in slums in Dhaka» (Arzu, personal communication, September 21, 2014).

It was generally striking how people conceptualized past and future as stretching only over a couple of days. «Nahar», when asked if she works, answered: «I did, in a house. I used to work in a house». When asked why she quit, she explained that she had been sick «for a few days». As one older villager expressed when asked on his thought of the next generation: «Plan nai!» (No plan!) (Md. Abiden, personal communication, September 23, 2014).
Chapter 9: Summary, policy recommendations, and conclusions

9.1. Collecting the threads

Attempting to address a void in environmental migration literature, this study has shown that women from the Bhola district in Southern Bangladesh migrate when environmental stressors impoverish their families. For women, there are no income opportunities in the villages. Conversely, garment factories in Mirpur prefer hiring women to men. Hence, gender-segregated labor markets both in the villages and in the Mirpur area in Dhaka influence incentives to move. Economic incentives to migrate are similar for men and women, but they may be even stronger for women because of the large difference in income opportunities in rural and urban areas.

At the same time, migration for wage work is associated with a strong negative stigma for Bangladeshi women. While «adaptation costs are usually expressed in monetary terms» (Adger et al., 2007, p. 724), this study has shown that a monetary focus may overlook other cultural constraints that can heavily influence not only the well-being of individuals, but also their willingness to take adaptive measures. This stigma also affects other family members, men and women alike, confirming that gender roles are relational and cannot be understood in isolation.

Gender roles in the Bangladeshi society are closely associated with the concept of purdah, forming what is perceived to be appropriate behavior for men and women. When a woman takes wage work, she is perceived as violating her purdah. This action also implies that her male guardian is unable to provide for her. Such perceptions lead to attempts to maintain a positive reputation by both male and female migrants. These attempts create patterns of misinformation that triple the burden of women, who are expected to simultaneously uphold their responsibilities at home, work (often more than) full time, and carry the stigma’s social burden.

Such costs associated with female wage work lead women to wait longer than men to migrate. This, in turn, creates households that are more vulnerable to environmental stress and poverty, partly due to the presence of fewer men. Indeed, the very act of female migration may imply that their households are vulnerable, a notion supported by the ILO: «culturally, women would not or would be less likely to migrate if they or their families were not in a dire situation» (ILO, 2014, p. 20).
Pointing to such vulnerabilities is not to say that the women in question are not exercising agency. In fact, the reality of having to overcome constraints may create a self-selection of migrating women. Women who choose to migrate often justify this by referring to the protection of more vulnerable household members, as old and sick parents or younger siblings. At the other hand, the anger of the non-migrating women towards women who migrate underscores the selectivity of migration among women. Non-migrating women are frustrated by their situation, and perceive how women breaking with their purdah to live a better life as unfair. This indicates that a significant number of women are trapped in the Bhola district. This can be explained by two factors. First, the importance of self-respect pose a constraint on women’s perceived ability to migrate. Second, the responsibility that comes with childbearing and in-laws prevent married women unable to take on other tasks, rendering married women at the greatest risk of being trapped. Married women often perceive their only option to be convincing their husbands the household should migrate, with the opportunity for them to take up wage work in the city alongside their husbands. The latter may not be in the plan from the outset, as misinformation often leads to-be migrants to think that the husband’s sole income will suffice. However, this is not the reality for migrants in the Bhola bustee.

When women do take on such a role, it is less sustainable than when a man migrate, as migrating women are typically unmarried, implying that the remittance flow will cease upon their marriage. However, in view of dwindling income opportunities in home the Bhola district, migration seems to be the best option available for vulnerable households and individuals. At the same time, it is questionable whether migration can be labeled as a successful adaptation strategy for the migrants that move from the Bhola district to Mirpur. Thus, migration both for men and women should be better facilitated for improvement of its adaptive potential.

9.2. Policy recommendations

No attempt will be made here to formulate conclusive policy recommendations. However, it must be noted that if policies are gender-blind, they are at risk of inadequately addressing the issue at hand (IOM, 2009: 9). Thus, in order to promote improvement, major problems should be identified, and is the purpose of this final section:

- The legal status of the slums should be settled. Although life in the slum cannot be said to qualify as an adequate standard of living, the threat of evictions is a constant stress-factor in the lives of the slum dwellers and should be dealt with to improve their abilities to plan for the future and to
live more dignified lives. State-recognition will enable slum dwellers to improve living standards in the slum by giving access to government infrastructure for water, electricity, and garbage. This could improve the slum’s overall sanitation conditions.

- Working conditions need to be improved. It is widely acknowledged that Bangladeshi women are paid significantly less than their male counterparts. This is one of the reasons why women are employed over men, along with the fact that women are easier to control, making it easier to pay them such low wages. By employing workers on gender-neutral grounds, income opportunities for men in Mirpur will increase, and may help push up salaries for women. It must be considered, however, whether hiring more men would put female job opportunities in jeopardy. It is important that policy makers as well as development agents account for this, as the garment sector is an important source of income for women.

- Facilitation of purdah could be a solution to lower the stigma of female factory workers. Such facilitation could include: breaks for prayer, fans to cool temperatures so that women can cover ‘properly’, and separate rooms to allow for the separation of men and women. These separate spaces would also permit women to cover less. Such spaces would also require the hiring of female supervisors. This could help empower women in the workspace and curb male harassment of female coworkers. At the same time, it should be acknowledged that such facilitations of purdah may help institutionalize existing gender inequalities. That female respondents reported purdah as important may help justify such policies.

- As women are seldom exempted from their care-taking responsibilities when taking up wage work, childcare facilities in the factories can help lessen this burden. This service is already provided in some factories, but should be expanded further.

- There seems to be a significant information gap in the Bhola community concerning expected and actual levels of income. Such information is crucial for better long-term planning of individuals’ and households’ livelihood opportunities, as well as for more dignified migration processes. Thus, measures should be taken to ensure diffusion of accurate information concerning opportunities and challenges.
• In view of the lacking data on internal migration in Bangladesh, more research should be conducted to better inform migration policies from urban to rural areas. Such research should further include gender disaggregated data to allow for more gender sensitive policies.

• Gender-sensitive data collection should further include a focus on potentially trapped populations, as information concerning this is limited. It is of particular importance to gain an understanding of who wishes to migrate and who does not, to help promote policies allowing for informed voluntary migration.

• In thought of the stigma that exists concerning working women, policymakers would benefit from focusing on social and cultural constraints, which may result in individuals perceiving their adaptive capacity as insufficient and ultimately create a limit to adaptation.

• Although women migrating internationally have received attention from ILO and IOM, women migrating internally in Bangladesh have been overlooked. Almost certainly larger in numbers, donor organizations should consider including internal female migrants in their target groups.

9.3. Conclusions

The findings of this study support the idea that gender influences all aspects of the migration process. Exercising strong influence on the behavior of individuals within the household, gender directs what income-generating opportunities are available, the level of wages, status of work, likelihood of migration, and perceptions of migrants. Gender also influences vulnerability by creating social and cultural thresholds for adaptation, affecting both the objective and subjective capacity of individuals to utilize migration as an adaptation strategy to environmental stressors. For adaptation to be successful, individuals should not be forced to migrate or forced to stay. To better facilitate planned and voluntary migration that allows vulnerable households prone to environmental stressors and loss of livelihoods to adapt, and in thought of the triple burden that migrating women often carry, more research on gender relations and the situation of women in the context of environmental migration is needed.

In short, three core points have been made. First, larger shares of women are active agents in migration processes than was initially expected. Second, female migration is associated with larger social costs than male migration, creating cultural constraints on female migration. Third, strong
push factors are required to explain the relatively large share of female migrants from the Bhola district. At the same time, not all women facing the same push-factors migrate. This shows the importance of perceptions in understanding migratory behavior and may further indicate the self-selection of migrating women. Importantly, strong push-factors indicate that migrating women come from vulnerable households. This raises the question of how many women who need to migrate face limits in doing so. Caught between relief and distress, and wanting to stay but wanting to go, potential female migrants have to negotiate between economic incentives and cultural constraints. Such dilemmas make it difficult to determine when women are trapped, when they move voluntarily, and when they are forced to do so. In conclusion, this study argues that women should not be perceived as passive, but rather active agents in migration processes, but facing greater struggles in achieving their goals. They therefore deserve more attention than they have thus far received.

«I lifted an anchor by coming here» («Anika»).
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(n.a.) (March 10, 2014). Thousands fired after Bangladesh factory found unsafe. *Al Jazeera*


Annex 1: List of interviews

Experts

Haider, Dilruba
Gender and Climate Change Coordinator
UN Women, Bangladesh
July 21, 2014

Neelormi, Sharmind
Associate Professor
the Department of Economics
Jahangirnagar University
GenderCC
July 22, 2014

Afsar, Rita
Honorary Research Fellow
Adjunct and Honorary Staff and Visitors
Social Sciences
The University of Western Australia
August 10, 2014

Munir, Shahreen
National Programme Officer
Labour Migration
International Organization for Migration
(IOM)
Dhaka
August 18, 2014

Nasreen, Mahbuba
Director & Professor
Institute of Disaster Management
and Vulnerability Studies(IDMVS)
University of Dhaka
August 7, 2014

Uddin, Ahsan Ahmed
Centre for Global Change (CGC)
July 22, 2014

Nyske Jansen
Junior Professional Officer
ILO, Dhaka Office
February 28, 2015

Key informants

In Dhaka

Baby, Quazi
Executive Director
Participatory Development
Action Program (PDAP)
NGO working in the Bhola Bustee
July 23, 2014

Monira
Informal slum leader
July 26 and October 10, 2014

Mustafa
Political leader of the Bhola Bustee
August 17, 2014

Monju Palma
ADP Manager
and colleagues
Mirpur Urban ADP
World Vision
NGO working in the Bhola Bustee
October 12, 2014

In Bhola district

Arzu, Md. Zasim Uddun
Executive Engineer
Mayors Office
September 21, 2014

Hakim, Abdul
Executive Engineer of
Operation Management Division
Bangladesh Water Development Board
Southern Zone
Bhola Office
September 21, 2014

Dhali, Dev Dulal
Deputy Director
District Training Officer of
Department of Agriculture Extention

Note: the opinions in this interviews are those of Jansen and are not to be read as official ILO statements.
Agricultural Office Bhola
September 21, 2014

Kabeer, Muhammad Hamidullah
and colleagues
Department of Social Welfare
Bhola Zila
September 22, 2014

Reza, Selim
District Commissioner
Bhola District
September 22, 2014

«Khalil, Muhammad»
Imam
Bhola Sadar Union
September 22, 2014

Maksidullah Mohammed
Imam
Bhola Sadar Union
September 22, 2014

Respondents

Bhola bustee:

Male respondents:

«Abdul»
Day laborer
Age: 35
September 1, 2014

«Rafiq»
Sanitary craftsman
Age: 30-35
September 1, 2014

«Malik»
Day laborer
Age: 20
September 2, 2014

«Amir»
Day laborer
Age: 25

Just arrived and looking for work
September 3, 2014

«Tasfiq»
Van driver
Age: 23
September 8, 2014

«Faisul»
Day laborer
Age: 35
September 13, 2014

«Reaj»
Day laborer
Age: 35
September 15, 2014

Focus group discussion
Key characteristics: male migrants working as
day labourers
Date: September 17, 2014
Participants: 6

«Hafiz»
Retired
Age: 60+

«Bashir»
Day laborer
Age: 35-45

«Ahmad»
Van puller
Age: 35-45

«Rahman»
Rickshaw puller
Age: 35-45

«Habib»
Construction worker.
Age: 30-35

«Salim»
Own small business and do odd jobs
Age: 35-45
Female respondents

«Anika»
Garment worker
Age: 17
August 29, 2014

«Israt» Shanta
Garment worker
Age: 18-19
August 29, 2014

«Seema»
Garment worker
Age: 19
August 29, 2014

«Rayhana»
Garment worker, just lost her job
Age: 25
September 4, 2014

«Nahar»
Age: 35
Housemaid, tea-vendor
September 4, 2014

«Aleya»
Housemaid
Age: 25-26
September 5, 2014

«Adila»
Housemaid
Age: 30-32
September 5, 2014

«Farzana»
Garment worker
Age: unknown
September 5, 2014

«Samira»
Looking for work
Age: about 20
September 11, 2014

«Nadia»
Garment worker
Age: 18-19
September 11, 2014

«Nayla»
Previous housemaid and garment worker
Age: 35
September 11, 2014

«Nasrin»
Garment worker
Age: 16
September 12, 2014

«Naureen»
Garment worker
Age: 17
September 12, 2014

Respondents in Bhola District

«Farhana»
Villager
Age: 35
Ilishia Union
September 24, 2014

«Halima»
Mother of female garment workers
Age: 50
Ilishia Union
September 24, 2014

«Nasir»
Fisherman
Age: 28
Ilishia Union
September 25, 2014

«Faiza»
Mother of female garment workers
Age: 50
Dhania Union
September 25, 2014

«Saleha»
Returned garment worker
Age: 25-30
Dhania Union
September 25, 2014

«Sharif»
Father of female garment workers
Retired fisherman
Age: 60 +
Sayeddpur Union
September 27, 2014

Focus group discussion
Key characteristics: returned female migrants who have worked in garments
Date: September 26, 2014

Dhania Union
Participants: 8
Age: 19-35

«Jameela»
«Nasreen»
«Sabah»
«Fatima»
«Shirin»
«Naju»
«Aysha»
«Tahera»

Focus group discussion
Key characteristics: women with no immediate relation to migrating women
Date: September 27-28, 2014

Sayeddpur Union
Participants: 7
Age: 25-60 years old

«Rehana»
Age: 30-40

«Sabiha»
Age: 30-40
Annex 2: Embankments


Above: Dhania Union Parishad, September 25, 2014. Embankment is new this season.
Above: Sayeddpur Union September 27, 2014. The embankment was destroyed by floods in July.