

To be or not to be a climate change refugee,
that is the question

An interpretive policy analysis of labeling and framing processes
of climate change refugees in Bangladesh

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Introduction

“If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences” (Thomas theorem 1928, p.571)

By now, the link between climate change and environmental damage has been firmly established and can be seen in the increased occurrence of droughts, desertification, rising sea levels and extreme weather circumstances (IPCC 2007; Williams, 2008). These changes will cause the loss and/or irreversible damage to people’s homes, land, and livelihoods which in turn will threaten their rights to life, health, property, means of subsistence, culture and in extreme cases, the right to self-determination (UNHCR, 2011b). Faced with these dangers some people choose to migrate, becoming so-called climate change refugees. Estimations of the number of climate change refugees differ considerably between a total of 50 million in 2010 according to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC, 2007), to 212 million climate refugees in 2050 as estimated by Myers (Myers, 2002 cited in Biermann and Boas 2009, p.10). However, despite the evident increased impact of climate change, the direct link between climate change and migration remains a point of contestation. On the one hand, the so called ‘maximalists’ claim that climate change refugees can be distinguished from traditional migrants as they primarily respond to push factors at their place of origin (Hugo, 1996; Morissey 2009, cited in Hall, 2010, p.3-4). They distinguish three causes of migration namely: predisposing conditions which refer to the biophysical environment, the population pressure upon natural resources and to the way in which nature is being exploited; precipitating events or naturally induced disasters¹ that cause reactionary migration; and facilitators and constraints of migration such as social networks, means of transportation, and government policies (Development Research Centre, 2008; Richmond, 1993 cited in Hugo, 1996) (see figure 1). This position is contested by the ‘minimalists’ who claim there are multiple reasons people decide to migrate, and multiple causes –both man-made and natural- for climate change (Black, 2001; Hugo, 1996). They subscribe to standard migration theories which distinguish between three causes of migration namely: push factors relating to the place of origin such as conflict, political instability, lack of access to resources and a lack of economic opportunities; pull factors relating to the place of destination such as demand for employment, higher wages, political stability and access to resources; and intervening factors, similar to constraints and facilitators of migration (Development Research Centre, 2008). The minimalists thus claim that climate change can be seen as just one of many factors that influence people’s decision to migrate, which renders a distinct label such as ‘climate change refugees’ redundant (Black, 2001; Morissey 2009, cited in Hall, 2010, p.3-4).

¹ Naturally induced disasters being: hurricanes, earthquakes, floods (salt and fresh water), fires, droughts, tornadoes, volcanic eruptions, electric storms, famines, whirlwinds, avalanches, hail and snow storms, lightning, plagues (Richmond, 1993 cited in Hugo, 1996, p.112)

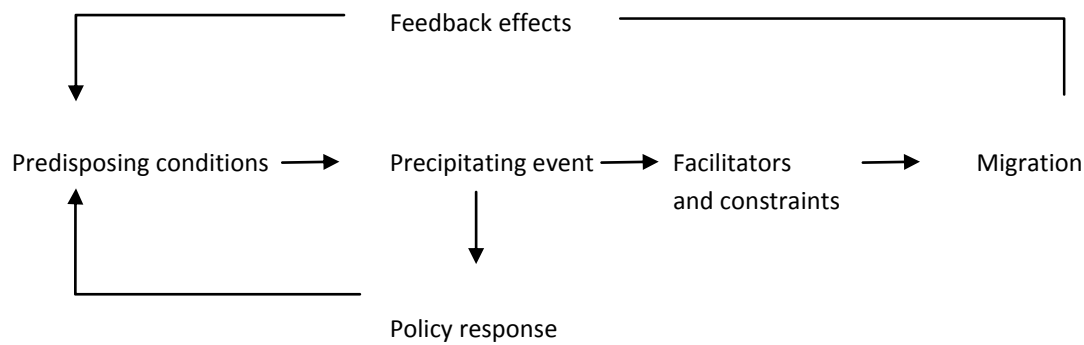


Figure 1: A Simple Model of Environmentally Induced Migration (Richmond, 1993 cited in Hugo 1996, p.111). When migration has occurred it might actually have a positive feedback effects on the area of origin as population pressure has diminished. Also, environmental policies may influence land-use methods and stimulate migration to areas that need to be cultivated (Richmond, 1993 cited in Hugo, 1996, p.110).

The ambiguity on the issue of environmentally induced displacement results in different perspectives on the recognition of climate change refugees. A difference can be perceived between developed and developing countries, and between international and local levels. Current climate change conventions have provided clarification on the issue of who should reduce the emission of greenhouse gasses, measures also known as mitigation. However they do not provide an answer to the crucial question of who should pay for the costs of reductions and the costs of coping with the damage that has already become inevitable, measures also known as adaptation (Sinden, 2010). The developed countries do not want to be held responsible or accountable for climate change and its effects, and are therefore reluctant to address the issue. The debate on climate change has therefore been focussed on mitigation measures; adaptation has only recently become a topic of interest. This in turn has effect on the international policy response. For example, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in several ways restricted in its conduct by their donating member countries, is reluctant to use the word “climate refugee” as it infringes upon the legal definition they use to protect refugees of war and conflict. On the other hand, developing countries that are currently facing climate changes advocate for timely action and compensation by the international community. In Bangladesh several local, policy-relevant actors recognize the existence of climate change refugees and are currently implementing practical solutions to help them such as provision of land, house and assets².

As of now, no universal recognition of climate change refugees exists nor is there a universal framework in place to protect them. Existing legal frameworks such as the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, and the UNHCR Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement

² Interview Mr. Musa, Director Association Climate Refugees, August 2011

provide insufficient protection for climate change refugees. Specifications on issues of causation of migration, type of migration and terminology are of great importance. First, analytically, to advance knowledge on flows of migration. Second, politically, because of the link between climate refugees and the overall climate change debate on liability, responsibility and compensation (Biermann and Boas 2009, p.6; Williams, 2008). Whether to include one or more groups of people into a category has implications for the size of the problem at hand and thus renders it an important issue for those responsible for paying the costs (Williams, 2008). Language is thus of great importance in this respect. Within the context of development policy-making, providing people with a certain label can both enable them to receive assistance as well as prevent them from receiving any. Policy-relevant communities are well aware of this and thus create certain labels with specific boundaries, to regulate the resources and services they are willing and able to supply (Wood, 1985). They legitimize their labeling practices through “framing”: the way in which a certain issue is defined and conveyed through the use of images, stereotypes, metaphors and messengers, which explains who is responsible for the issue and suggests particular solutions for the problem at hand (Ryan 1991, p.59). Framing also precludes certain undesired or expensive solutions which lie outside the framework (Wood, 1985).

Even though no international consensus has been reached on labels and responsibilities to deal with the policy-issue of climate change refugees, it is interesting to discover how –despite this– different labels and frames are being used by policy-relevant actors who have to deal with climate change displacement. The aim of this research then, is to find out whether different solutions for their assistance are constructed in Bangladesh, as reflected in policy suggestions and practices and whether international and local frames and labels on the issue of “climate change refugees” are compatible. Bangladesh was chosen as a case study because due to its climate, its many rivers, its low elevation level and its location at the sea it is a very disaster prone country at the fore-front of climate change. The objectives of this research are:

- To discover how different policy-relevant actors in Bangladesh label and frame the issue of climate change refugees;
- To discover whether conflict or consensus between interpretive communities exist;
- To discover how Bangladeshi actors deal with the lack of international consensus on the issue.

The main question I will be answering in this thesis is: *How are climate change refugees labeled and framed by policy-relevant, interpretive communities in Bangladesh, and how does this relate to the international problem perception?* The sub-questions to be answered in this thesis are:

- What labels are used?
- What category boundaries are used?

- Are labels being portrayed as objective, rational or natural?
- What are the principles of organization (frame) that guide policymakers conduct?
- Who is suggested to be responsible?
- What are suggested solutions?

To answer this question I have chosen a research approach based on the interpretive policy analysis of Dvora Yanow (2000). Rather than assuming that policy problems are objectively rational or factual in character (as with labeling practices), the policy analyst should try and map out how the policy-issue is framed differently by the various interpretive communities and why (Yanow 2000, p.11). I will do so by analyzing organizations' structure, their policy discourse and their policy activities and the meaning these have for the policy-relevant actors. The resources I have used to retrieve my data are: observations, interviews, policy documents, websites, maps and newspaper articles.

This research is relevant first, because local organisations who face climate change refugees in everyday life might offer some valuable insights into the problems related to typology, type and cause of migration and into policy practices used to help climate change refugees, if indeed they are seen as such. As aid on a local level does not necessarily have to be linked to official agreements on responsibility or liability, lessons can be learned without having to spend precious time waiting for international consensus. If for example, local communities dealing with climate refugees do not refer to them as 'climate refugees' and recognize that there are multiple causes for people to migrate, this would contribute to the analytical knowledge on flows of migration that is needed and it would lead to insights as to how to assist these people. Second, uncovering the –likely- different perspectives between policy relevant communities provides insights into their prospective reactions to challenges ahead and into the mutual relationship of communities. Understanding what issues are really important to a group can help build shared sentiments between them and foster the political dialogue (Ryan, 1991). This research will uncover what exactly matters to whom and why, which will contribute to mutual understanding. Third, as Bangladesh is a very disaster-prone and poor country this research will provide insight into the efficiency of policy-making targeted at climate change victims in Bangladesh.

This thesis will be structured as follows. In chapter one I will discuss the international debate on the issue, the importance of labeling and framing herein and my choice of method and approach. In chapter two I will discuss the predisposing conditions of Bangladesh and the policy response of the Government on the issue of climate change induced displacement. In chapter three I will discuss interpretive community one consisting of international organizations in Dhaka, their claims and the meanings of these claims within the context in which they were formed. In chapter four I will do the same for interpretive community two consisting of (mostly) nongovernmental organizations located in

remote, disaster-prone areas. In chapter five I will discuss the differences and similarities between the claims and meanings of the interpretive communities in Bangladesh. In the conclusion I will discuss my findings within the broader international and academic debate on climate change induced displacement.

1. Climate change induced displacement and interpretive communities

International debate on climate change mitigation and adaptation

As early as the 1960s and 1970s the anthropomorphic influence on climate change was a topic of debate among meteorologists. With evidence growing stronger that carbon dioxide emissions, amongst others, contributed to the greenhouse effect, political efforts to achieve significant emissions reductions intensified (Rittberger and Zangl, 2006). Finally, in 1992 at the Earth Summit in Rio, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was signed by 150 states. The UNFCCC entered into force on 21 March 1994 and calls upon all parties to the convention to adopt measures and policies to protect the climate against anthropomorphic change (UNFCCC, n.d.a). Governments are expected to: gather and share knowledge on greenhouse gas emission, national policies and best practices through regular reconvening of a Conference of Parties (COP); launch national strategies targeted at greenhouse gas emissions and adaptation including the provision of financial and technological support for developing countries; and cooperate in preparing for adapting to the impacts of climate change (Rittberger and Zangl, 2006; UNFCCC, n.d.a). Another step forward was made in 1997 at the COP3 in Kyoto when the Kyoto Protocol was drafted as an extension of the UNFCCC framework. While the convention *encourages* countries to stabilize greenhouse gas emissions, the protocol actually sets binding targets for the European community and 37 industrialized countries, or Annex I countries, to reduce emissions compared to the 1990 level (UNFCCC, n.d.b). The UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol obligate the developed countries to reduce more than the developing countries as they are primary responsible for the current high levels of pollution due to the past 150 years of industrial activity, a principle known as “common but differentiated responsibilities” (UNFCCC, n.d.b). This principle was unacceptable to some countries, such as the USA, which delayed the ratification of the Protocol to 16 February 2005 (Rittberger and Zangl, 2006; UNFCCC, n.d.b).

The convention and the protocol provided clarification on the issue of who should reduce the emission of greenhouse gasses, or mitigation. However they do not provide an answer to the crucial question of who should pay for the costs of reductions and the costs of coping with the damage that has already become inevitable, or adaptation (Sinden, 2010)³. Adaptation is still in a stage of

³ In debates on climate change a distinction is made between policies aimed at mitigation and policies aimed at adaptation. Policy responses regarding mitigation include: guidelines on pricing the cost of carbon into the costs of people’s actions; policies aimed at the transfer of knowledge to achieve changes with regard to low carbon and high efficiency technology; and policies to raise awareness and behavior change by regulation, education and financing (Stern 2006, cited in IUCN 2008, p.5). Adaptation policies include ways to cope with unavoidable impacts and to reduce vulnerability to climate change, despite mitigation efforts, but also to reap

institutional development, knowledge generation and preparation which has to take place before action can be taken on the ground to benefit the vulnerable communities (Kartha et.al., 2006). Adaptation first became a hot topic within the UNFCCC negotiations in 2007 during the COP13 held in Bali, Indonesia (UNHCR, 2011b). This session created the Bali Action Plan and laid down features of adaptation which might be considered for inclusion in an international climate agreement (ibid.). The same COP13 resulted in the adoption of the Bali Road Map which chartered the course for a new negotiation process to tackle climate change which was envisaged to be completed by 2009 (ibid.). In this regard the Ad Hoc Working Group on Long-Term Cooperative Action (AWG-LCA) was created to prepare the ground for a successful climate agreement to follow up the Kyoto Protocol. The task of the AWG-LCA was to explore whether Parties and Observers proposals contained elements on “*enhanced action on adaptation and mitigation and the associated enabling and supporting actions*” (UNFCCC 2007 cited in UNHCR 2011c, p.5). The AWG-LCA subsequently highlighted vulnerabilities and adaptation practices to extreme events and long term impacts (UNHCR, 2011c).

At the same time a significant change occurred at the UNFCCC forum: before 30 September 2008, right before COP14, submissions from both Parties and Observers were accepted; after that date only Party’s submissions were allowed. This meant that research and operational organizations or Observers had to search for other means in order to get their message across (UNHCR, 2011c). This resulted in a massive mobilization of the humanitarian community –UN agencies, research, and civil society- to ensure that the human face of climate change would be known to the international community (ibid.). So from COP 13 onwards, adaptation and humanitarian concerns entered the regular debate (ibid., figure 1). In December 2008 migration and displacement are first mentioned in the UNFCCC assembly text; in December 2009, at COP 15 in Copenhagen draft paragraphs were written for negotiating text and policy documents (ibid.). Eventually the increasing attention for adaptation and the displacement issue lead to the creation of the Cancun Adaptation Framework at the 16th COP in Mexico in 2010. There the non-binding “Cancun Agreements” were concluded which read:

Invites all Parties to enhance action on adaptation under the Cancun Adaptation Framework, taking into account their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective

the economic benefits in areas where small changes are actually beneficial (Stern 2006, cited in IUCN 2008, p.5). Assistance to climate change refugees as a policy-issue falls under the latter as it concerns damage already done. Up to now, however, international negotiations and activities on climate change have mainly focused on mitigation measures and the progress on adaptation is thought to run behind roughly a decade (Kartha et.al., 2006).

capabilities, and specific national and regional development priorities, objectives and circumstances, by undertaking, inter alia, the following: (...)

(f) Measures to enhance understanding, coordination and cooperation with regard to climate change induced displacement, migration and planned relocation, where appropriate, at national, regional and international levels (IOM 2011b, p.2-3).

Although the last decade has seen progress to bring adaptation and the issue of climate change displacement to the foreground, in contrast to mitigation, the case for a global framework on adaptation is more nuanced. The global interdependency which characterizes mitigation is less direct in the case of adaptation (Adger, 2001; Kartha et.al., 2006). The benefits of one country's mitigation are shared with all countries, therefore the need for international cooperation with regard to climate mitigation is clear (ibid.). Also, it does not matter where greenhouse gas emissions are produced and reduced so mitigation can be dealt with in a highly effective way there where they are most cost-effective (ibid.). In contrast, the benefits of adaptation strategies are felt mostly at the local community level where the specific activities are undertaken and less so on an international level (ibid.). In this respect a divide between countries can be detected in consequent negotiations. The developed countries or the North have the greatest share in greenhouse gas emissions (UNFCCC, n.d.b), are the least likely to be affected by it, yet have the most means and money at their disposal to adjust should this be needed (Sinden, 2010). Developing countries or the South however, have a smaller share in emissions, are most likely to be affected due to their geographical location, yet are the poorest and thus have a hard time adapting (Sinden, 2010; Stern 2006, p.7). When it comes to the question of who should take responsibility and compensate for the costs of climate change then, developed countries emphasize the efficiency of the artificial carbon market to enhance the collective social welfare (Sinden, 2010). They thus effectively embrace the status quo without having to look to the past or take responsibility for damage done (ibid., p.295). Developing countries advocate a solution that takes into account the 'historical burden' when discussing this issue. They argue that developed countries are the ones who caused the problem and it would therefore be fair if they would bare a greater part of the costs (ibid.). Also, they argue for equality in opportunities as they too want industrial development (Drumble, 2002). They fear global environmental regulation will come to be an impediment to industrial development and national economic growth (ibid.). Finally, there is also incapability on the part of the developing countries to bear the direct and indirect costs involved in enacting, administering and enforcing the domestic laws that needed to follow up on international agreements and the technology and resources needed to mitigate polluting activity (ibid., p.4). The case for a global framework on adaptation then, is characterized by its basis in the political context of the climate regime and the mutual moral responsibility of societies (Kartha et.al., 2006).

International policy response to climate change refugees

The lack of consensus between developed and developing countries on an adaptation regime and the growing climate-security discourse has been of great significance for the policy-response to climate change refugees. As of now, the most important institution for the protection of refugees is the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (Biermann and Boas, 2009; Williams, 2008). As the Convention was drafted in the aftermath of the Second World War two requirements have to be met before being considered a refugee: first, there must be a “*well-founded fear of being persecuted*” and second, the reasons for this persecutions should be based on “*race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political conviction*” (UN General Assembly 1951, p.152). Clearly there is no provision specifically for climate change refugees and the Convention is restricted to those people who cross state borders, which is too restrictive for the problem at hand (Williams, 2008). Another legal framework that might offer more prospective in this respect are the UNHCR Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement which were drafted in 1998 for the UN Commission on Human Rights (UNHCR) to provide internally displaced persons (IDP’s) with an appropriate framework for protection and assistance (IDMC, n.d.). The IDP Guiding Principles read:

Persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obligated to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalised violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognised State border (UNHCR 1998, p.5).

This definition clearly entails climate change refugees. However, this legal framework too has shortcomings as the responsibility to protect internally displaced persons lies with the national authorities while climate change is a global problem with international liabilities. Additionally the IDP framework has a nonbinding legal status; implementation follows from national willingness. Finally, this definition excludes those environmental refugees crossing state borders, again too narrow an approach for the problem at hand (Williams 2008, p. 511-513). In conclusion, a coherent legal framework to protect climate change refugees is still missing.

Upon closer examination a number of criteria are of importance when trying to create a protective framework for climate refugees. Specifications on issues of causation of migration, type of migration and terminology are of great importance: analytically to advance knowledge on flows of migration, and politically because of the link between climate refugees and the overall climate change debate on liability, responsibility and compensation (Biermann and Boas 2009, p.6; Williams, 2008). With regard to *terminology*, two distinctions are important: first the one between ‘refugees’,

‘migrants’ or ‘displaced persons’ which indicates whether or not they are granted protection of existing legal frameworks and institutions; and second the distinction between ‘climate change’ and ‘environmental’ which indicates what reasons to migrate (man-made or natural hazards, or both) fall within the definition. The term ‘refugee’ has strong connotations of societal protection in many cultures and religions all over the world so some argue that it should be used with care (Docherty and Giannini, 2009) while others defy this, arguing that calling these people mere “displaced persons” would downplay the hardships they had to endure (Biermann and Boas 2009, p.9).

With regard to *causation of migration*, two things are of importance: the character of the environmental change and whether the consequences of climate change constitute the primary reason for people’s decision to migrate (Hall, 2010; Williams, 2008). There are still some disagreements on exactly which environmental changes are causes for migration, whether it was gradual or sudden and whether it was caused by man or nature (Williams 2008, p.507). Whether to include one or more of these groups of people has implications for the size of the problem at hand and thus renders it an important issue for those responsible for paying the costs. Another point of contention is whether climate change can be seen as the primary cause for people to migrate (Hall, 2010). Several authors, so called ‘minimalists’ claim that climate change may be seen as just one of many factors that influence people’s decision to migrate, which renders a distinct label such as ‘climate change refugees’ redundant (Black, 2001; Morissey 2009, cited in Hall, 2010, p.3-4). Other authors, the ‘maximalists’ claim that climate change refugees can be distinguished from traditional migrants as they primarily respond to push factors at their place of origin (Hugo, 1996; Morissey 2009, cited in Hall, 2010, p.3-4).

With regard to the *type of movement*, distinctions can be made as to whether a person was compelled to leave or not, whether the relocation is temporary or permanent, and whether the migration is within borders or beyond (Biermann and Boas, 2009; Docherty and Giannini, 2009; Williams, 2008). The degree of compulsion of refuge relates to the acuteness of the threat and whether there is still protection left to rely on. Some have argued that those displaced as a result of environmental change could still ask their government for support and should therefore be distinguished from traditional refugees who cannot rely on government support (Docherty and Giannini 2009, p.358; Williams 2008, p.509). In the same regard, whether someone has to stay permanently or could return to its habitat has implications for both the kind of protection as well as the amount of protection he can receive. The distinction between internal or inter-state migration is important as this parallels the divide in international law between refugees and IDP’s. Including both internal and inter-state migration would call for a new definition. Incorporating only refugees might overstretch the scope of the Refugee Convention and contribute to fears within the international

community of opening up the flood gates (Williams 2008, pp.510, 523)⁴. Including only IDP's would render the state responsible, a responsibility moreover which not all states have the means for to handle (Docherty and Giannini, 2009). The latter distinction is thus important as it is here where the responsibility to protect is located: with the state or with the international community.

The effect of setting category boundaries and labeling climate change refugees becomes clear in relevant institutions' policies. A number of different existing institutions come to mind to address the climate change refugee protection issue. First, the UNHCR with its profound experience on forced migration seems to be uniquely placed to take on the issue. The UNHCR was established in the post World War II era to provide international protection of refugees under the auspices of the UN. Both the Refugee Convention and the agency were focused specifically on the refugees of war in Europe and not on those displaced because of natural disasters who were deemed the responsibility of national governments (Hall, 2010). Like all UN agencies, UNHCR is made up of member states which monitor UNHCR's work to ensure that it stays within its mandate and it does not overstretch its budget. Member states' fundamental concern is that the UNHCR does not take on issues which are beyond its mandate and therefore requires more funds (ibid.). So although officially, "*the work of the High Commissioner shall be of an entirely non-political character*" (UNHCR, 1950), the Office in reality is not void of political influence of its member states (Hall, 2010; McNamara, 2007)⁵. This has implications for the possible assistance of climate change refugees by the Office as well. In the words of a UNHCR diplomat:

We convene the international refugee protection regime; UNHCR would argue that it's a logical impossibility for somebody to be an environmental refugee because of the grounds of becoming a refugee as stipulated in the 1951 Convention does not contain any reference to environmental issues (pers comm., 2004 cited in McNamara, 2007, p.19).

The policy response of the UNHCR to climate change induced human mobility then, has been mainly focussed on: integrating disaster risk reduction into country programs; creating better coordination between stakeholders to prepare for and respond to emergencies (including natural disasters); assisting

⁴ Another development which is important to mention in this respect is how migration as a policy-issue has become more politicized in both developed and developing countries and has come to be accompanied by an anti-immigration sentiment. Especially after the terrorists attacks of 9/11 immigration has become more linked to security issues by politicians (Barnett 2003; Martell, 2010, p.118; Smith, 2007).

⁵ Indeed a quote from a Regional Environmental Affairs Officer with UNEP illustrates this very clearly: "*As of yet we haven't started doing anything on this issue... For environmental refugees to be included in our mandate, you need all the sort of political backups, right? At UNEP we work on a governing council basis made up of certain donor governments, whereby everything comes up through governments and is funded by governments, so political issues, sensitive political issues such as this are not within our mandate*" (pers comm, 2004 cited in McNamara, 2007, p.18).

and protecting refugees and IDPs fleeing natural disaster; advocacy for the rights and needs of persons within its mandate; partnership with other UN agencies and coordination of various bodies to raise awareness about the humanitarian and human rights implications of climate change (UNHCR, n.d.). Although in many ways climate induced displacement is addressed by the UNHCR it avoids the term “refugee” thereby effectively avoiding responsibility and solutions specifically aimed at “climate change refugees”.

Another important international organization concerned with environmental displacement, is the International Organization for Migration (IOM), an intergovernmental organization which was established in 1951. It grew out of the need for an international body to deal with the population that became displaced during World War II and especially those who were not protected by the Geneva Convention (IOM Dhaka, 2011). The most important principle IOM adheres to is that *“humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society and works with all stakeholders to maximize the potential benefits of migration”* (ibid.). The Organization has addressed the topic extensively yet there is a growing consensus among the IOM and the UNHCR, that the use of the term “environmental refugee” should be avoided because it is misleading and could potentially undermine the international legal regime for the protection of refugees (IOM, 2010). Moreover, it would undermine the Convention and contribute to fears within the international community of opening up the flood gates for refugees (Williams 2008, pp.510, 523). IOMs policy response to climate change induced human mobility then, is mainly focussed on delivering humanitarian aid in the aftermath of disasters, disaster risk reduction and community stabilization to prevent further forced migration (IOM, n.d.b). Next to that their regular development programs on human trafficking are used to prevent abuse of the vulnerable displaced communities⁶.

Theory and methodology

Even though there are institutions in place, seemingly suited to provide protection for climate change refugees, they are careful not to overstretch the mandates they are bound by. As has become clear language is of great importance in this respect, and two concepts in particular namely: labeling and framing. According to Geoff Wood (1985), labelling is an everyday reality for otherwise social relations would be too anarchic and unpredictable to manage. The issue is thus not “whether *we label people, but which labels are created and whose labels prevail to define a whole situation or policy area, under what conditions and with what effect*” (Wood 1985, p.349). The tricky point about labelling is that it appears as natural and objectively true as it shelters behind an ideology of rationality and avoids being seen as prejudice (ibid., p.345):

⁶ Interview with Anita Wadud, project development and program coordinator of IOM, 18 July 2011

Labelling, we agreed, was a way of referring to the process by which policy agendas are established and more particularly the way in which people, conceived as objects of policy, are defined in convenient images. (...) Furthermore [we agreed], that authoritative state labelling had recourse to a language of rationality which was itself a source of legitimacy and therefore power. This rationality, we realized, was sustained by the cooptation of science for policy. The taxonomies of development social science were being recruited to present the political as non-political (Wood 1985, p.343-44).

Within development policymaking then, providing people with a certain label can both enable them to receive assistance as well as prevent them from receiving any. The creators of labels determine the rules of inclusion and exclusion through determining rules of qualification and eligibility which gives them the power to regulate the access to particular resources and privileges (ibid., p.352). The difficulty for them is to uphold the ‘charitable game’ while at the same time they have to try and keep the effects of labelling constrained when resources are scarce (ibid., p.358).

The legitimation of a particular label helps sustain the charitable image and is done through constructing and maintaining a framework within which others perceive the problems. Erving Goffman (1974) uses the concept of ‘frame’ in order to understand the ‘rules’ which govern our perception of what it is that is going on around us and enables us to differentiate between different sorts of ‘reality’ (Goffman, 1974). He characterizes frames as follows:

I assume that definitions of a situation are built up in accordance with principles of organization which govern events –at least social ones- and our subjective involvement in them; frame is the word I use to refer to such of these basic elements as I am able to identify. That’s my definition of frame (Goffman 1974, p.10-11).

For example a library is seen as such because of the interior set-up with rows of cupboards stacked with books, a comfortable seating area with people reading, and a silent atmosphere. Anyone entering a building organized according to those principles will likely understand that he can come and rent books here. Goffman’s frame analysis primarily focuses on how frameworks are constructed and the role of the individual in it and not on the structure or organization of society at large (ibid., p.13). Therefore in order to understand how a policy-issue –climate change refugees- is framed by different policy-relevant groups, the definition provided by Charlotte Ryan (1991) is useful. She defines framing as the way in which a certain issue is defined and conveyed through the use of images, stereotypes, metaphors and messengers, which explains who is responsible for the issue and suggests particular solutions for the problem at hand (Ryan 1991, p.59). This will also preclude undesired and/or more expensive solutions which lie outside the framework (Wood 1985, p.359). Frame-analysis then, is a tool for ordering information about how people perceive political problems and/or contests

(Ryan 1991, p.73). To understand how an opponent organizes his frame provides insight into his reactions to all kinds of situations. This will also help the challenger to choose his own position and effectively fight his opponent's. At the same time, frame analysis is also a tool for building dialogue. Understanding what issues are important to a group can help build shared sentiments and draw former opponents back into the political dialogue (ibid.).

Even though no international consensus has been reached on labels and responsibilities to deal with the policy-issue of climate change refugees, it is interesting to discover which labels and frames – despite this- are being used by policy-relevant actors in a country vulnerable to climate change. Bangladesh was chosen as a case study because, due to its many rivers, its climate, its low elevation level and its location at the sea, it is a disaster prone country at the fore-front of climate change (Agrawala et.al., 2003; Akter, 2009). In order to uncover labels and frames used by different communities in their policy-response, I used Dvora Yanow's (2000) qualitative, interpretive policy analysis. Interpretive policy analysis serves to comprehend what policy documents and practices mean to the different communities affected by them such as policymakers, implementing agency personnel and affected citizens (Yanow 2000, p.10). These communities are referred to as 'interpretive communities' when group processes have stimulated the members to share the same thoughts, speech, practice and their meanings to talk about ideas and action (ibid., p.10). So, rather than assuming that policy problems are objectively rational or factual in character, the policy-analyst should try and map out how the policy-issue is framed differently by the various interpretive communities and why (ibid., p.11). Yanow identifies five steps to analyze policy (see table 1). First, it is necessary to identify the artifacts (symbolic language, symbolic objects, symbolic acts) that are significant bearers of meaning (values, beliefs, feelings) for a certain policy-issue, as perceived by interpretive communities and policy relevant actors (ibid., p.15, 22). Second, you have to identify the communities of interpretation that are relevant for the policy-issue of concern and which create or interpret the artifacts and meanings (ibid., p.20, 22). Third, community discourses have to be analyzed⁷. The fourth step consists of identifying the meanings that are in conflict between or among groups and their conceptual sources (affective, cognitive, and/or moral) (ibid., p.20, 22). The analysis could end here, yet the researcher could also choose to take it one step further and, fifth, intervene or act upon his findings (ibid.).

⁷ As frames are often expressed through language and the relationship between language, cognition and action is a very complex one, it is hard to tell which one shapes or causes the other. Therefore the first two steps can lead to each other, and steps 1,2, and 3 are usually done at the same time (ibid., p.12, 22).

1. Identify artifacts and meaning accorded to them
2. Identify the interpretive policy-relevant communities
3. Identify community discourse
4. Identify the conflicting meanings between or among groups
5. Show implications of different meanings for policy makers

Table 1: Interpretive policy analysis of Dvora Yanow (2000).

Approach

First, as for my own choice of label, I chose to use the definition of “climate change refugees” as described by Biermann and Boas (2009):

People who have to leave their habitats, immediately or in the near future, because of sudden or gradual alterations in their natural environment related to at least one of three impacts of climate change: sea-level rise, extreme weather events, and drought and water scarcity (Biermann & Boas 2009, p.9).

I have chosen this definition over other definitions because it only includes those causes directly related to climate change while at the same time no distinctions are being made between internal or intra-state refugees or between forced or voluntary migration (Biermann & Boas, 2009). In theory then, all kinds of climate refugees could be included in this definition. Logically, in the course of this research the meaning of this definition will be contested by people using other frames who wish to include or exclude certain criteria. I will have to be open to those views to gain a proper understanding of their framework.

Second, the method of Yanow is very comprehensive and I was able to include many of the abovementioned elements in my approach, yet not everyone. I chose to follow her analysis through to step 4: identifying the conflicting meanings within and among groups. Due to the exploratory, small scale character of the research, I thought it too ambitious to elaborate on implications (step 5). With regard to *symbolic language*, Yanow offers two methods to discover meaning accorded to a policy-issue: metaphor and category analysis. To uncover a metaphor in policy language and acts and to uncover its meaning for the actor or agency within their frame of reference, helps understand the structure of the policy argument (Yanow 2000, p.43-44). Using a contrasting case and making the differences between the case and the metaphor explicit, will help to extricate the fundamentals of the metaphor (ibid., p.44-45). After initial analysis, I decided to use metaphors to uncover how different policy target groups were perceived. For interviews I would first identify which target groups were

being mentioned by the organization and then I would contrast these target groups with either: (1) the term the organization chose to use for climate refugees or (2) climate change refugees/ environmental refugees/ or displaced persons, which I deliberately formulated in an indefinite way. Interviewees were then able to describe the similarities and differences between categories which provided me with a clear image of the label or categories they used. The resources I used to analyze were policy documents such as annual reports, outlines of policy programs, and organizations' websites. A limitation I had was that the interviews I held in Khulna were conducted using a translator which sometimes proved difficult as the translator did not understand the question or he would answer the questions himself. Also, being under ACR's guard lead me to speak primarily to allied organizations and climate refugees who were possibly to receive help of ACR. This might have lead to some bias in the answers I retrieved.

Policy meanings are not only communicated through language but also through physical, *symbolic objects*. These meanings are most typically conveyed through the use and the materials of the built spaces where policies programs are being enacted, and through the policy programs both as they are put on paper in policy language as well as how they are actually enacted in objects (ibid., p.62-63). During my interviews I was able to make observations of the buildings in which the organizations were located. I paid attention to the exterior, to the location of the building, to the amount of security that was present, to the interior, whether there was air-conditioning, how many computers there were, how many staff was employed, and the information that was available. Also I looked at the hierarchy within the organization, the location of headquarters and field offices, to get an idea just of how involved an organisation was with the local community. A limitation I had, was to gain a comprehensive view of the small-scale rural organizations as they often had limited material for me to read and not always a website to check. Some of the publications I could find had conflicting views in them which made it hard to draw solid conclusions. Also, I conducted a number of interviews (LEDARS, IRVDB, GKS) over e-mail and therefore I was not able to make observations of their offices.

With regard to *symbolic acts*, it is useful to look for meanings inherent in: first, acts of legislation, holding of hearings, inviting clients' views on the matter and the omission of any of these acts, and second, in the comparison between acts and words (Yanow, p.76). Of the three analytic categories, analyzing symbolic acts can be the most complicated, because they are the least visible to an outsider and accessing communities to uncover their meanings takes large amounts of time and effort (Yanow, 2000). As I had time constraints I was not able to regularly attend meetings and to uncover meaning in the actual implemented policy programs as I did not get the chance to visit the organizations' working area. However I did analyze the policy programs and policies the organizations had implemented and those that were currently running. In order to see whether shifts or changes in

interest had taken place I chose to analyze thematic work field and the operational areas of an organization. To uncover institutional strengths and weaknesses I looked at the annual budget and important donors as well, provided this information was available. Taking the abovementioned alterations into account, I thus analyzed organizational characteristics, policy discourse and policy activities as displayed in table 2.

With regard to *meanings* and their conceptual sources -affective, cognitive, and/or moral (corresponding to feelings, values and beliefs): they are quite abstract and difficult to discover directly (ibid.). Nevertheless we do know a lot about what people value and belief as this is tacitly known and communicated through the objects, acts and language of everyday life. These have acquired meaning in certain contexts and members of certain contexts share those meanings (ibid.). Also, with regard to both policy analysis and labelling it is important to look beyond the objective, rational character of a policy problem or label to see to what extent prejudice and/or knowledge (regarding institutional strengths and weaknesses) are being used to legitimize the use of a particular framework (Wood, 1985; Yanow, 2000). Therefore I chose to use other research material to be able to discover the context within which the claims of interpretive communities were being made and uncover the meaning of language, objects and acts within this context. Finally, as this is an interpretive approach, I have tried to conduct this research with “passionate humility” – “*the conviction that one is right coupled with the possibility that one might be wrong*” (Yanow, 1997 cited in Yanow 2000, p.92). Especially with regard to the comparison between interpretive communities in Bangladesh and between these and the international community I had to be very careful which I tried to be.

- Organization

Focus: organizations' capabilities and status

Resources: observations of building's exterior and interior, design of websites, organizational structure, location of headquarters and field offices

- Policy discourse

Focus: labelling and categorization including:

(1) terminology: environmental/climate change, displaced/migrant/refugee

(2) type of migration: forced/voluntary, temporary/permanent, internal/international

(3) causation of migration: gradual/sudden, man-made/nature, primary/several reasons

Resources: Policy documents, interviews, websites and newspaper articles.

- Policy activities

Focus: past and current policies and programs

Resources: Policy documents, thematic work field, operational areas, budgets, donors, websites and interviews

Table 2: Research method including elements of labelling, framing and interpretive policy analysis.

2. Bangladesh: vulnerabilities and resilience

To understand the exposure and sensitivity of Bangladesh to climate change impacts and its adaptive capacity and vulnerabilities, I will now provide a brief description of the predisposing conditions⁸ and recent precipitating events in Bangladesh. Also, some basic information will be provided of contextual factors such as demographics and economics. Because, besides vulnerability being inversely related to adaptive capacity, physical vulnerability relates to socioeconomic vulnerability as well; the impacts of disasters –caused by climate change or not- are often exacerbated by preexisting challenges such as overpopulation or a small resource base (Poncelet, 2009; Smith, 2007)⁹.

Physiography and climate change impacts

Bangladesh is part of one of the largest delta's in the world, the Bengal delta (see figure 2) which is formed by a network of the large rivers Ganges, Brahmaputra, and the Meghna, or the GBM-river system (AIT-UNEP, 2001; Ministry of Environment and Forests, 2005). The land area of Bangladesh can be divided into three categories: the floodplain which constitutes nearly 80% of the countries' landmass, the Pleistocene terrace accounting for 8%, and the tertiary hills in the North bordering the Himalaya accounting for 12% (Ministry of Environment and Forests, 2005). The delta is cut through by a system of about 700 rivers, canals and streams which carry an enormous amount of sediment-laden water downstream (BBS 1979, 1998, cited in AIT-UNEP, 2001, p.96). Bangladesh has a humid, warm and tropical climate and the seasons are mainly influenced by the circulations of the South-West monsoon originating from the Indian Ocean (Agrawala et al., 2003). As more than 80% of the 2,300 mm annual precipitation falls during the monsoon period, a critical factor to estimate is whether precipitation will increase or decrease (ibid.). It is extremely low elevation level - 20% is 1 meter or less above sea level- and it's low topography render Bangladesh extremely vulnerable to water related disasters such as cyclones, storm surges, and tornadoes (AIT-UNEP, 2001; Agrawala et.al., 2003; Akter 2009, p.4). The intense precipitation that accompanies cyclones adds to the damage as it causes inland and rivers flooding (Agrawala et.al., 2003).

⁸ Predisposing conditions are the biophysical environment, population pressure upon natural resources and the way in which nature is being exploited

⁹ To gain a comprehensive understanding of Bangladesh' predisposing characteristics I refer to Annex 1 to 3 which include maps of population density, extreme poverty, and disaster prone areas respectively.

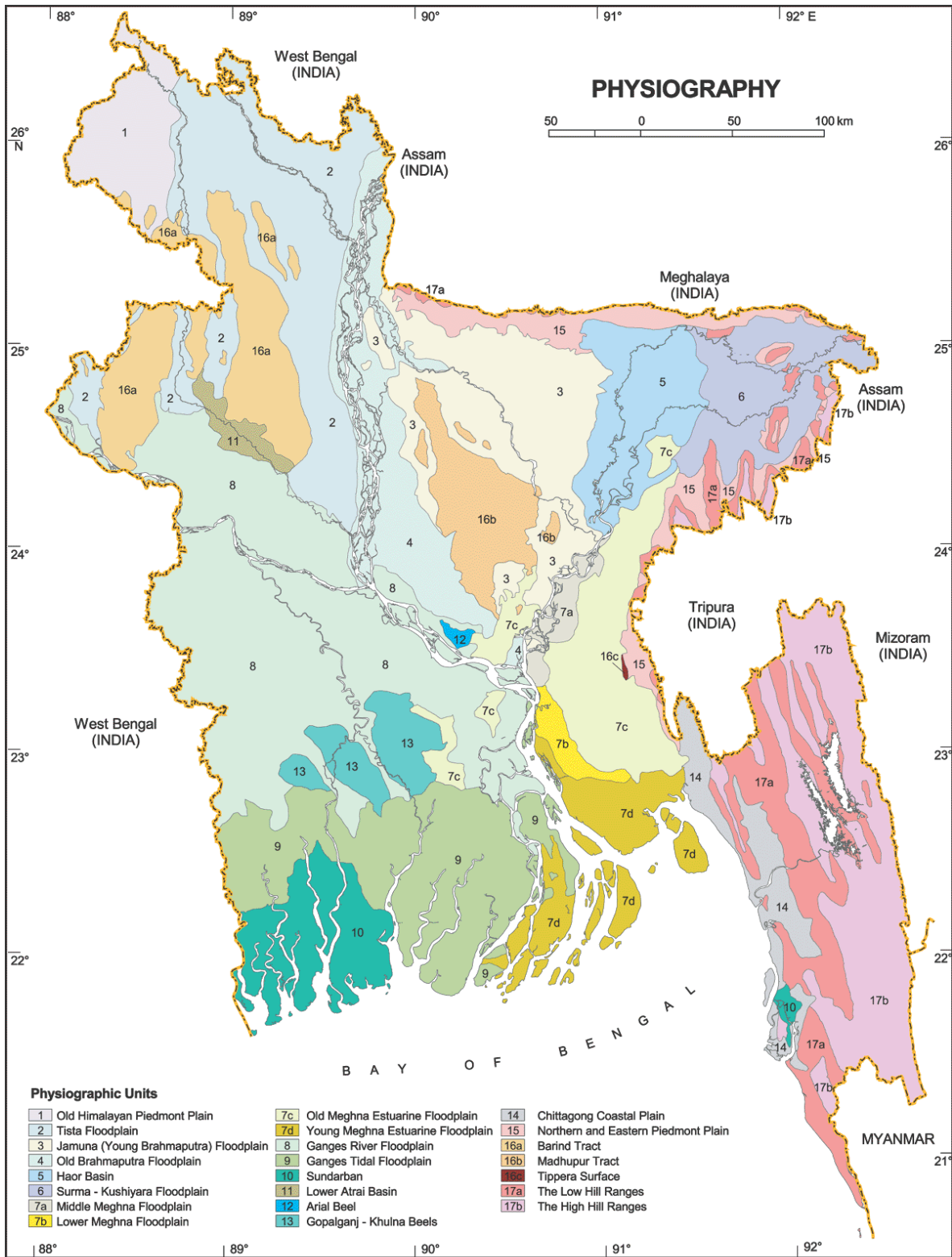


Figure 2: Physiography of Bangladesh (cited from: Banglapedia, 2006).

The societal exposure to the abovementioned risks is exacerbated by the higher population density and the dependency on the natural resource base (Agrawala et.al, 2003). Bangladesh is one of the most populous countries in the world with 158,570,535 inhabitants (July 2011 est.) living on a total of 130,168 square kilometers (CIA World Factbook, 2011). Compared to its high population growth rate, the country has a low natural resource base; only 55.4% of the land is arable, and 3.08% has permanent crops (AIT-UNEP, 2001; CIA World Factbook, 2011). With a growth rate of 1.566% (2011 est.) the population and their various needs are ever-growing, settlements have spread in urban as well as in rural areas and therefore the area 'not available for cultivation' has increased (Agrawala, 2003; CIA World Factbook, 2011). As almost all sectors of the economy including agriculture, water, forests, habitat, industry, and horticulture compete for land, resources are becoming more scarce (Agrawala et.al., 2003). Because many people depend on the natural resource base for their daily income, the scarcity of land and the disaster proneness of the country lead to widespread poverty; in 2010 still 40% of the population lived under the poverty line (CIA World Factbook, 2011). Particularly in coastal, southern areas people are mainly small farmers, agricultural laborers and fishermen and the higher poverty rate compared to the central parts of Bangladesh is therefore related to environmental degradation (Akter, 2009). Nevertheless, the economy has grown 5-6% per year since 1996 (CIA World Factbook, 2011).

According to several different institutes and models Bangladesh is and will be faced with several changes in climate and the consequent impacts in the near future (see table 3). The OECD (2005) who developed several climate change models, states that all models calculate a steady increase of temperature for Bangladesh and most models estimate that precipitation will increase during the summer monsoon (June, July, August) while at the same time droughts in winter time (December, January, February) are likely to increase in both intensity and frequency (Agrawala et.al., 2003; Ministry of Environment and Forest, 2009). According to the third (2001) and fourth (2007) assessment reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the greatest effects of climate change in Bangladesh will be: an increase in sea-level rise, increased glacier melt in the Himalayas, increased precipitation, and increased intensity of cyclone winds and precipitation (Agrawala et.al., 2003). The subsequent impacts faced by Bangladesh are and will be in the areas of: coastal resources, agriculture and livelihoods, water resources, human health, and drought (Agrawala et.al., 2003; IPCC, 2001; IPCC, 2007).

- Sea-level rise is a major threat as it could cause large-scale inundations of low-lying delta's and estuaries, retreat of coastlines and changes in the water table (IPCC, 2001). Coastal Bangladesh is particularly vulnerable as 12 of 19 districts are directly exposed to the sea and has a population density of 570 persons per square kilometer (Akter, 2009). IPCC estimates that a rise in sea level of 1 meter will inundate an area of well-over 29,800 square kilometer, displacing 14.8 million

people (IPCC, 2007 cited in Akter, 2009). Sea-level rise also adds to the risk of flooding as the high sea-level will prevent the customary discharge of the big rivers into the Bay of Bengal (NIDOS, 2009);

- Due to increased glacier melt in the Himalayas massive amounts of melt water increase the downward flow of rivers (Akter, 2009). As the flow is expected to gain speed down from the Himalayas through the Ganges and Brahmaputra rivers and into the coastal area, an increase in riverbank erosion due to climate change is predicted (Akter, 2009).
- Increased episodic flooding storm surges as well as increased rainfall would penetrate much further inland heavily affecting agricultural production, through the loss of land as well as the salinization and acidification of soil in low-lying coastal areas (IPCC, 2001). The combined effect of higher sea water levels, salinity intrusion in river estuaries, higher riverbed levels and reduced sedimentation would impede drainage and increase water logging problems (Ministry of Environment and Forests, 2005). Water logging in turn might increase the risks for infectious, water-borne diseases to break out, such as diarrhea, dysentery, malaria and typhoid, as well as an increase in malnutrition (IPCC, 2007).
- Increased intensity of cyclone winds would contribute to enhanced storm surges, coastal flooding as well as inland flooding due to increased associated rainfall as soon as the cyclone makes landfall (IPCC 2007, cited in NIDOS, 2009, p.3).

It is also deemed possible that predicted rises in temperature might increase the occurrence of droughts in North-Western and South-Western parts of the country, affecting people's livelihood options (Akter, 2009). However most models do not provide a clear picture of how drought will increase and estimates are not significant (NIDOS, 2009). Finally, as many people lose their livelihoods they might move and are moving to urban areas which increases environmental, resource and economic pressures over there (IPCC, 2007). Also a decrease in freshwater is expected due to climate change coupled with population growth and higher demands (IPCC, 2007; Ministry of Environment and Forests, 2005). Combined with poor drainage systems and poor quality housing this results in risks to health and the risk of a higher number of fatalities should a disaster hit (UN-Habitat, 2008/2009).

The abovementioned manifestations of climate change and impacts have already become most visible in recent years with subsequent droughts, cyclones, floods and riverbank erosions affecting the country. In the past 31 years, from 1960 to 1991, a total number of 19 droughts occurred, affecting 53% of the population of the country and 47% of the country (Akter, 2009). From 1970 to 2009 a total number of 26 major cyclones hit Bangladesh, with the number of occurrence significantly increasing in 1990, and also the highest number of affected people being recorded after 1990 (ibid.). The tropical

cyclones in 1970 and 1990 respectively killed approximately 500,000 and 140,000 people and resulted in extensive damages to houses and livelihoods in coastal communities (Ministry of Environment and Forest, 2009). More recent examples include the 2005 floods inundating the Bhola Islands, the 2007 cyclone Sidr and the cyclones Bijli and Aila both in 2009 (Akter, 2009). Especially the impacts of cyclone Aila remain very vivid, as a majority of the displaced people today still haven't been able to return to their homes and thus remain in make-shift tents on flood-prone embankments (Kumar et.al., 2010).

As a result of Bangladesh' vulnerability to climate change, a number of people are and will be migrating to safer places. Little comprehensive local research is available yet (IOM, 2010) and available data of the (prospective) number of climate change refugees in Bangladesh differ considerably between predictions well into the 21st century and estimations right after major disasters. Norman Meyers (1994) from the Oxford University has studied over 2000 sources and, assuming that nothing would be done to slow global warming, in 1994 came to his conclusion that by 2050 a number of 15 million people will be displaced in Bangladesh (Myers, 1994 cited in Friend of the Earth, n.d., p.8). Brown (2004) in Gemenne and Lu (n.d.) claims that a mere 1 meter rise in sea-level would inundate half of Bangladesh' rice land and force the migration of 40 million people. Tahera Akter (2009) studied historical trends in the occurrence of cyclones, floods, riverbank erosion and droughts in Bangladesh and the displacement that followed, and subsequently calculated that future displacement will amount to approximately 49 million, 63 million and 78 million people in 2010, 2015 and 2020 respectively (Akter, 2009). The Disaster Management Bureau of Bangladesh estimates that every year about 500,000 people are displaced by riverbank erosion (cited in IOM, 2010). According to official records cyclone Sidr displaced 650,000 people; about 20,000 people were displaced by cyclone Bijli; and another 842,000 by Aila (Akter, 2009; Kumar et.al., 2010). After cyclone Aila struck in 2009 according to Reuters 825.000 people were displaced in Bangladesh. The Norwegian Refugee Council has made estimations of the number of displaced people after the floods of July 2008 and August 2008 respectively 2,250 and 15,238 (IDMC, 2011). According to the Association of Climate Refugees, it were only 200.000¹⁰. As confusing as the abovementioned figures might be, the situation is such that a comprehensive, conclusive answer to the question of "how many" cannot be given. However, it is safe to assume that Bangladesh is currently dealing with climate change induced displacement.

¹⁰ Interview with Abu Musa, director of Association for Climate Refugees, August 2011

Types of Disaster	Areas Affected	Impact
Flood	Floodplains of the <i>Brahmaputra-Jamuna</i> , the <i>Ganges-Padma</i> and the <i>Meghna river system</i>	Loss of agricultural production, disruption of communication and livelihood system, injury, damage and destruction of immobile infrastructure, disruption to essential services, national economic loss, evacuation, and loss of human lives and biodiversity, displacement and sufferings of human population and biodiversity
Cyclone and Storm Surge	Coastal areas and offshore islands	Loss of agricultural production, disruption of communication and livelihood system, damage and destruction of immobile infrastructure, injury, national economic loss, loss of biodiversity and human lives, need for evacuation and temporary shelter
Tomado	Scattered areas of the country	Loss of human life and biodiversity, injury, damage and destruction of property, damage of cash crops, disruption in lifestyle, damage to essential services, national economic loss and loss of livelihood
Drought	Almost all areas, especially the Northwest region of the country	Loss of agricultural production, stress on national economy and disruption in life style
Flash Flood	Haor Basins of the North-east region and South-eastern hilly areas	Damage of standing crops, disruption in life style, evacuation and destruction of properties
Hail Storm and Lightning	Any part of the country	Damage and destruction of property, damage and destruction of subsistence and cash crops and loss of livelihood
Erosion	Banks of the <i>Brahmaputra -Jamuna</i> , the <i>Ganges-Padma</i> and the <i>Meghna river systems</i>	Loss of land, displacement of human population and livestock, disruption of production, evacuation and loss of property
Landslide	Chittagong and Chittagong Hill Tracts	Loss of land, displacement of human population and livestock, evacuation, damage of property and loss of life
Earthquake	Northern and central parts of the country	Damage and destruction of property, loss of life and change in geomorphology

Table 3: Climate change causes and impacts, vulnerable areas and impacted sectors (cited from AIT-UNEP 2001, p.93).

Policy response of the Government of Bangladesh

In view of the many challenges that Bangladesh faces due to climate change, the government of Bangladesh (GoB) has initiated a number of policies and programs to ameliorate circumstances¹¹. Since the early 1990s several studies have been conducted and policies have been implemented to protect the national environment and adapt to climate change¹². There are three key policy documents

¹¹ The Environment Policy and Implementation Plan (1992), National Forestry Policy (1994), Livestock Development Policy (1992), National Fish Policy (1998), National Tourism Policy (1992), National Energy Policy (1996), National Policy for Safe Water Supply and Sanitation (1998), National Rural Development Policy (2001), National Education Policy (1997), National Water Policy (1999), National Agricultural Policy (1999), Industrial Policy (1999), National Shipping Policy (2000), National Health Policy (2000), and the National Land Use Policy (2001) (Coastal Zone Policy 2005, p.1).

¹² the 1994 Assessment of Vulnerability Bangladesh to Climate Change and Sea Level Rise; 1997 Climate Change Country Study Bangladesh of the U.S. Climate Change Study Programme; 2000 Climate Change and Adaptation Study for Achieving Sustainable Development in Bangladesh; 1994 Country Study on Bangladesh under Regional Study of Global Environmental Issues Project of Asian Development Bank; 2004 Synthesis Report on

which are quite recent and focus on climate change adaptation and/or mention displacement: the 2005 Coastal Zone Policy (CZP), the 2005 National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA), and the 2009 Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (BCCSAP). Throughout the documents you can perceive a slight change in focus from sustainable livelihood development and poverty reduction in the face of climate change, to environmental displacement specifically. The Coastal Zone Policy was designed because the Government found that even though the coastal zone had many potential to contribute to national development, it was lagging behind in socio-economic development and existing initiatives to deal with different disasters and gradual deterioration of the environment were lacking (Ministry of Water Resources 2005, p.1). The coastal zone comprises 19 districts¹³ or one third of the country and is defined as such because of its vulnerability to tidal waters, salinity intrusion and cyclone/storm surges (ibid., p.2). Throughout the document it becomes clear that the primary objectives of the CZP are economic growth, poverty reduction and development (ibid.). Although the issue of “climate change refugees” is never explicitly mentioned in the CZP, the relationship between climate change and vulnerability of the coastal zone is directly addressed:

The level of the well being of households has direct correlation with exogenous phenomena influencing them. Disasters like cyclone, drainage congestion, land erosion and drought that take toll on life and property and depletion of natural resource base that supports particularly the poor. Majority households are vulnerable to climate change. In the coastal zone, agriculture continues to be a major source of employment, which is seasonal in nature (Ministry of Water Resources 2005, p.4).

So you could say that the coastal zone policy is a recognition of the GoB of the vulnerability of the coastal people due to their disproportionate exposure to climatic change as compared to the rest of the country. Although the CZP does not speak of climate refugees then, it does identify some of the areas and the people most vulnerable to climate change. These vulnerable communities are mostly to be found in remote rural areas, cyclone-prone coastal regions, chars, river erosion affected areas, and coastal islands.

The National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA) is a framework being adopted by most poor, developing countries to address the issue of adapting to environmentally induced hazards

(Martin, 2010)¹⁴. The decision to prepare a NAPA came forth from the UNFCCC COP7 in November 2001 (UNFCCC, 2001)¹⁵. The Bangladesh NAPA assesses climate change and possibilities for adaptation within a framework of economic development and poverty reduction (Ministry of Environment and Forests 2005, p.4). The identified adaptation needs and proposed programs then, are focused on sustainable livelihood options for those who stay in the vulnerable areas. In this regard it is quite similar to the CZP and again vulnerable groups and areas in Bangladesh are: the poor – and among them the women, children, elderly and the sick being the most vulnerable - will suffer more disproportionately than the non-poor and more so in the rural and coastal areas than elsewhere (ibid., p.17). Throughout the NAPA no specific mention is made of “climate change refugees” yet, contrary to the CZP, “migration” is mentioned twice as a concern related to climate change. Project no.11 and no.12 are aimed at the promotion of adaptation of agriculture systems to overcome the impacts of enhanced flooding and salinization (ibid., p.35-37). Migration might occur when tidal surge floods inundate the country longer than usual which causes saline intrusion. This in turn causes poor harvesting, which causes the lack of food and, ultimately, causes the mal-nourished population to move to cities or other areas for jobs and livelihood (ibid., p.35). Adoption of various agricultural technologies might reduce social problems of the “flood affected” or “distressed communities” and halt the “mass scale migration to cities” in search of jobs and livelihood (ibid., p.36-7). The most important cause of migration then, seems to be a loss of livelihood as so many are dependent on endangered natural resources. The type of movement seems to be forced as people have no livelihood to rely on anymore. Though the discussion of the link between climate change impacts and possible migration in the NAPA can be said to be nearly negligible, in contrast to the CZP it is explicitly mentioned and the impacts of climate change on the livelihood of people are recognized as various and grave and leading to a decrease in employment, income and consumption (Ministry of Environment and Forests 2005, p.16).

The Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (BCCSAP) was drafted for the first time in 2008 and revised in 2009 and is the most explicit of the three documents on the issue of climate change refugees. It is an extension and implementation of the 2007 Bali Action Plan and its four building blocks – adaptation, mitigation, technology transfer and adequate, timely funding- which came into being at the 13th COP (ibid., p.2). The BCSSAP sets out six key areas of action including: food security, social protection and health; comprehensive disaster management; infrastructure;

¹⁴ Countries who prepare NAPAs have to provide summaries of available information, undertake an assessment of vulnerability, propose key adaptation measures and criteria for prioritization of certain activities and present a short-list of priority activities that will address their most urgent needs as further delay would increase vulnerability and costs at a later stage (Martin, 2010).

¹⁵ The Government of Bangladesh (GOB) ratified the Convention on 15 April 1994, and ratified the Kyoto Protocol on 22 October 2001 (UNFCCC, n.d.b).

research and knowledge management; mitigation and low-carbon development; and capacity building and institutional strengthening (ibid., p. xvii-xviii). Throughout reading the BCCSAP it becomes clear that, in line with the CZP and the NAPA, poverty reduction and development are priority areas for Bangladesh and adaptation and disaster risk reduction are priorities before mitigation and low-carbon development. In this respect, a number of policy target groups¹⁶ were named that were also prevalent in the NAPA such as: the poor, extremely poor, women, children, farmers, and fishermen (ibid., 2009). A big difference with the NAPA however is the specific mentioning of “environmental refugees”. A number of phrases refer directly to them:

- *In the worst case scenario, unless existing coastal polders are strengthened and new ones build, sea level rise could result in the displacement of millions of people – ‘environmental refugees’- from coastal regions, and have huge adverse impacts on the livelihoods and long-term health of a large proportion of the population (Ministry of Environment and Forests 2009, p.1).*
- *Increased river bank erosion and saline water intrusion in coastal areas are likely to displace hundreds of thousands of people who will be forced to migrate, often to slums in Dhaka and other big cities. If sea level rise is higher than currently expected and coastal polders are not strengthened and/or new ones build, six to eight million people could be displaced by 2050 and would have to be resettled (Ministry of Environment and Forests 2009, p.14)*
- *Resettlement of environmental refugees invoking the free movement of natural persons must be monitored and adequate institutional support is to be provided (Ministry of Environment and Forests 2009, p.2-3).*
- *Build the capacity for education and training of environmental refugees to ease and facilitate their migration to other countries and integration in new societies (Ministry of Environment and Forests 2009, p.29).*

The term “*environmental refugee*” thus reappears a number of times and the rules of boundary have become more clear and even estimations of their numbers are being given. As causes of the migration saline intrusion, increased frequency and intensity of cyclones and storms, and increase in river bank erosion are named. These are seen as threats to livelihoods and the major factors to “*push*” people or “*force*” people to move out of their original settlements (Ministry of Environment and Forests 2009, p.59). The type of movement is forced then. Moreover, for a densely populated country as Bangladesh

¹⁶ The term ‘policy target group’ or ‘target group’ is meant to refer here to those people for whom the organizational policies are designed. To recall: a policy target group only constitutes an interpretive community when group processes have stimulated the members to share the same thoughts, speech, practice and their meanings to talk about ideas and action (Yanow, 2000)

any further concentration of people in the same safe areas will not be desirable thus out-migration, first within the country and then to areas far beyond, is not to be ruled out (ibid., p.59).

After identifying the several target groups in the CZP, the NAPA and the BCCSAP including “environmental refugee”, a number of reoccurring characteristics can be found: the coastal zone is identified as being most vulnerable to climate change such as sea level rise, drought, and increased frequency and intensity cyclone and/or storm surges, and is therefore most exposed to its impacts such as salinity intrusion, river bank erosion. Its inhabitants are mostly the poor, extremely poor, women, children, farmers, and fishermen and the loss of livelihood is one of the major reasons to migrate. The type of migration seems to be both forced and international, and the character of the migration can be both sudden as with cyclones or gradual as with salinity intrusion. However also a number of things remained unclear. First, a number of labels is used in the different documents and not in a consistent manner. It therefore remains unclear what label is preferred and why. Second, whether the migration is temporary or permanent and whether there are more or one reason for people to migrate is not stated in any of the documents. Third, it remains unclear whether “environmental refugees” are perceived to be a specific group of people with specific needs, or whether they are perceived to be a certain type or sub-category of ‘poor’, ‘extremely poor’ and so on. The subsequent questions then would be, first, whether the programs put forth in the BCCSAP were targeted primarily at the ‘poor’ etc. or also specifically at ‘environmental refugees’, and second, whether policy-relevant actors in Bangladesh follow the Government’s lead or not.

3. Interpretive community 1: Dhaka-based International Organizations

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) together constitute an interpretive community. Bangladesh became a member state of the IOM in November 1990 when the IOM helped repatriate 63,000 migrant workers back to Bangladesh during the Persian Gulf Crisis and in 1998 a Cooperation Agreement was signed between IOM and the GoB (IOM Dhaka, 2011). As stated before, the IOM was established right after the 2nd World War and the most important principle it adheres to is: *“humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society and works with all stakeholders to maximize the potential benefits of migration”* (IOM Dhaka, 2011). Although the IOM is not officially a member of the UN yet, they do enjoy a lot of the same privileges, function as if they were, and they perceive themselves as working under the bigger UN umbrella¹⁷. The UNDP has been in Bangladesh almost since its independence, since 31 July 1971. The basis for UNDPs support is established in the Standard Basic Assistance Agreement which was signed in 1986 by the GoB and the UNDP. The main aim of the support is: *“solving the most important problems of their economic development and to promote social progress and better standards of life”* (UNDP, 2011), through connecting countries to knowledge, experience and resources (UNDP, 2010a). The main reasons the IOM and the UNDP can be said to constitute an interpretive community¹⁸ are first, their use of the labels “migrant” and “displaced” which precludes protection of the Geneva Convention. Second, both have a close work relation with the Government of Bangladesh. Third, their policy activities are aimed at their own areas of expertise yet do include “displaced” or “migrants” to a certain extent. Fourth, are anticipating a change of mind at the Government level as a solution for climate change refugees.

Organization

Both organizations reside in very high quality buildings in Dhaka. The UNDP is located in a heavily guarded, 15 floor building on a separate plot of land within within two miles of the parliament (see annex 4). A security check is required to enter the impressive entrance which is decorated with marble-like stone. At every floor an armed guard is posted. The building is well-lit, well-furnished, colored in bright UN-blue, and air-conditioned. The floor I visited was divided into numerous little offices, well-furnished with bureaus, chairs, computers and bookshelves. The lobby had a bookstand with English, laminated ‘Project Factsheets’ to take. UNDP does not have any other field offices in Bangladesh. The IOM is situated in Gulshan 1, a neighbourhood known in Dhaka for its high-quality

¹⁷ Interview with Anita Wadud, project development and program coordinator of IOM, 18 July 2011

¹⁸ Communities are ‘interpretive communities’ when group processes have stimulated the members to share the same thoughts, speech, practice and their meanings to talk about ideas and action (Yanow 2000, p.10).

housing (see annex 4). The IOM is also guarded, with one guard at the outside gate and an appointment is necessary to enter. The lobby is somewhat small with a desk to report and a couch to wait on. The office where the interview took place looked like a conference room and was well-furnished, well-lit and air-conditioned. IOM does not have any other field office in Bangladesh. Other offices I visited in Dhaka such as the Bangladesh Center for Advanced Studies (BCAS), International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and Practical Action, were more sober, more basic and less extensively furnished. All in all, the two offices had a very “Western” look and feel to them. Especially in a poor country as Bangladesh, where land and energy are scarce, the costly materials that were used, the location of the buildings and their scale, indicated wealth and power.

Policy discourse

It is clear that the International Organization for Migration (IOM) is very much aware of the international debate on climate change refugees that is going on. They propose their own definition and make clear distinctions as to who should (not) belong to that category:

Environmental migrants are persons or groups of persons who, predominantly for reasons of sudden or progressive changes in the environment that adversely affect their lives or living conditions, are obliged to leave their homes or choose to do so, either temporarily or permanently, and who move either within their country or abroad (IOM 2011a, p.5).

The definition is quite inclusive. With regard to type of movement, it can be temporary as well as permanent, internal as well as international, voluntary and forced. The cause of the environmental change can also be both sudden-onset and gradual. The only element that poses restrictions is the label “environmental migrants”. The IOM has a firm –minimalist- position on the subject. First, it is the impacts of climate change (on soil fertility, on water availability and quality, on occurrence of natural disasters) *in combination with* structural social and economic factors (access to resources, information, opportunities etc.) that determine whether or not someone will migrate or not (IOM 2011a, p.4). Also, just as climate change is one of the many factors influencing the decision to migrate, migration is just one of many possible reactions to climate change impacts (IOM, 2010). Second, the term “refugee” is not applicable to situations arising from climate change – apart from a few exceptional cases- as it has a very specific meaning under international law (IOM 2011a, p.4). As most vulnerable groups they identify people living on the river islands or *chars* and the coastal zones (ibid.).

As the UNDP is less focussed on migration specifically, the issue of “climate change refugees” is less elaborately discussed let alone categorized and this is also the point where they differ mostly from IOM. However, when talking to the UNDP official he did not use the word “refugee”

either only “displaced people” or the “displacement issue”¹⁹. The displaced people he referred to were mostly people displaced by or living in the area affected by cyclone Sidr and Aila and, after further inquiry, also the people displaced due to river bank erosion²⁰. In this respect, the UNDP recognizes the vulnerability of the coastal communities living in the south western, low lying deltaic regions as well. The official also said that the UNDP has no specific programs for displaced people; the programs of UNDP are mostly targeted at the poorest of the poor. However the UNDP does work in areas which also has displaced people so they are included in some of the UNDP programs²¹.

Not using the term “refugees” has consequences for the kind of help climate change refugees might receive and especially the IOM is well aware of this. First, in the paragraph following their definition they go on to explain that even though there is no legal instrument explicitly for environmental migrants, whether people move due to the impacts of natural disasters or gradual changes in the environment, every State is responsible to adhere to the international human rights law and the international migration law protecting all migrants on its territory (IOM 2011a). Moreover, there are a number of soft-law provision which provide protection for internally displaced persons such as the IDP Guidelines (ibid.). The IOM then, sees “environmental migrants” as a sub-category of “migrants” and believes the existing protective framework for migrants is sufficient. Second, the IOM states, it is rarely the poorest who migrate because they don’t have the resources to do so. Not migrating then, might be a sign of greater vulnerability so preventing migration and keeping people in their home towns might render people more rather than less vulnerable (ibid.). “Environmental migration” then, can be seen as a survival strategy as well as a positive livelihood and adoption strategy (IOM 2010, p.vii). For example, if an environment is deteriorating gradually, temporary and circular migration at an early stage might diversify the household livelihood, and remittances might generate extra income (IOM, 2011a). This type of migration then, can be seen as a ‘safety net’ and migration as adaptation can enhance national economic development (IOM 2010, p.ix).

Naturally, with their pro-poor focus, the UNDP also emphasizes a human rights approach. Through their programs on governance they work to ensure the civil rights of the people to live a better life with dignity. This goes for every citizen of Bangladesh:

It’s the people’s right actually, they have to have their own basic rights for foods, shelter, education, and health all these are basic things.(...) That is here also the case for justice,

¹⁹ Interview with highly placed official at UNDP, 18 July 2011

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

*those people who have lost nearly everything, displaced people have their own demand as a citizen of their country*²².

So both IOM and UNDP refer to existing human rights institutions for environmental migrants or displaced people to find protection just like every other citizen. Moreover, currently in the same regard as the IOM, the UNDP is exploring the possibilities for a ‘safety net’ as a tool for people to become more resilient. As part of their early warning programs an initiative is pending, and some research is being done to alert the government, the NGOs, the civil society and the community to think together about how to solve those problems and: *“to develop a framework for safety net riverbank erosion victims and the potential and already displaced”*²³. Although the IOM takes the position that the decision to migrate might be seen as a positive way for people to actively adapt to changing circumstances, the phrase ‘safety net’ implies in a way that the people it is meant for are in need of a net to be caught by. Or at least have very little to come by as a safety net sounds more of a back-up plan to fall back to when everything other fails. How the IOM is envisaging this safety net to work, by people themselves or initiated and supported by organizations, is quite unclear. The same holds for the UNDP. What do the people need, how will the safety net look like: it is not clear, as research work is still being done.

What becomes clear throughout the analysis is how both organizations have particular interests at heart and are grappling with how to combine this with the interrelated topic of climate change. The very use of the phrases “climate change-environment-migration nexus” (IOM 2010, p.9) and “climate-environment-energy-poverty-nexus” (UNDP 2010 c, p.20) seems to indicate a certain caution to the topic: there is a relation (nexus) but how it works or how to address it: we are not entirely sure. Indeed the IOM said that, the topic is fairly new in Bangladesh and IOM wasn’t sure at first whether it was necessary to do something about it because there is too little solid data: *“Whatever it is we know these things are happening, we know that people are being displaced, but the thing is there’s no numbers, it could be 10 it could be 10.000, we don’t know”*²⁴. Moreover, because they only monitor people *within* created settlements, it was difficult for them to monitor the people who left the settlements and why²⁵. This is contradicted by the UNDP-official who says the data and the awareness are present, however there is no response, and both they and the IOM are aware of that. Asked directly after the organizations cautious stance on the issue of assisting “climate change refugees” both gave as one reason amongst others their relation with the Government of Bangladesh. The UNDP is most directly linked to the GoB through their Memorandum of Understanding which says that: *“Assistance*

²² Interview with highly placed official at UNDP, 18 July 2011

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Interview with Anita Wadud, project development and program coordinator of IOM, 18 July 2011

²⁵ Ibid.

shall be provided by the UNDP under this Agreement only in response to request submitted by the Government and approved by the UNDP” (UNDP, 1985). The official at UNDP states that, although the UNDP and the GoB devise programs through mutual understanding *“until and unless government requests or government approves, you cannot move on your own”*²⁶. The GoB however, never expressed a desire to either the IOM or the UNDP for a program on environmentally displaced persons. The UNDP believes the GoB has been mainly focussed on relief work after disasters instead of on risk reduction. Therefore, Bangladeshi politicians as of now are not attuned to human needs²⁷. According to the UNDP official then the reluctance of the government in combination with limited resources limits their ambition to actually do something for the people²⁸.

As the IOM is an intergovernmental organization, most of their activities are supplementing or complementing government activities and they work closely together. Asked after the possible reasons for the GoB’s lack of interest, the IOM official said that although the GoB was quite active on the international level to address the issue, and it seems to be coming up at the higher level, it has not yet *“trickled down to the policy level, the working level”*²⁹. This in turn has an effect on the willingness of donors to fund projects. Donors usually work on their own agenda and at the moment the donor strategy or the donor priorities don’t seem to align with the needs of displaced people for sustainable livelihood. Even though they are focused on areas as climate change and environment, this is more to do with green development and less so with the *“human dimension”* of it³⁰. According to IOM, donors ultimately want to feed into the government’s agenda and if displacement is not an issue for them just yet it is not likely to become one for the donors either³¹. With regard to responsibility then, the IOM seems to wait for the displacement issue to trickle down to the working level in which the GoB and donors have a key role to play (IOM 2010, p.35). The same goes for the UNDP, unless the Government requests or endorses a program, their activities remain limited to advocating and alerting if a policy-issue needs attention:

*We are looking at the problem but we are not responding to the situation. That is the unfortunate part. In that case as an UN agency we cannot sit, if government sits silently, we are trying to alert the government*³².

²⁶ Interview with highly placed official at UNDP, 18 July 2011

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Interview with Anita Wadud, project development and program coordinator of IOM, 18 July 2011

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Interview with highly placed official at UNDP, 18 July 2011

Policy activities

The scope of the organizations' focus, determined by their constitution, in combination with their close relation with the Government then, seem to prevent specific programs targeted at climate change refugees. However, both organisations adhere to a human rights approach and therefore are aware that the policy-issue cannot be ignored. Both the UNDP and the IOM officials said that environmental migrants or displaced people to some extent fall within their current programs. One of the first major IOM emergency relief programs in the field in Bangladesh was after cyclone Aila struck in 2009³³. The IOM is leader of the Camp Co-ordination and Camp Management Cluster (CCCM) and their concrete programs are disaster relief with provision of non food items, and when the situation endured, as it did after Aila, their regular development programs kicked in³⁴. Asked what these programs were focussed on however, they were mostly targeted at counter-trafficking –one of IOMs major programs- and not at livelihood –the biggest post-emergency concern³⁵. The 'safety-net' concept too, is focussed on remittances a well-known area to IOM. This is also reflected in their relation to the GoB as the most important ministries they work with are the ministry of Expatriates, Welfare and Overseas Employment, Women and Children Ministry and Ministry of Home affairs³⁶. Another initiative is the Displaced Tracking Monitor³⁷ which is used in all kinds of displacement situations yet in Bangladesh it specifically keeps track of the families which have been displaced by Aila. However, the families are only monitored as long as they stay in the area under investigation and receive goods from the IOM. If they move beyond the settlements, the IOM will literally lose track of them. So, currently there are no programs specifically designed by the IOM for environmental migrants in Bangladesh³⁸. This discrepancy between their organization's main focus and the situation on the ground is most clearly illustrated in the following quote:

It is unclear the extent to which the initial wave of 'seasonal' migration from Aila has translated into more permanent out-migration, and how many of the migrants who have not returned – both men and young women - continue to maintain connections with their families,

³³ Interview with Anita Wadud, project development and program coordinator of IOM, 18 July 2011

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ "DTM is simply a participatory tool to track and monitor the IDPs in camps or camps like settlements such as spontaneous settlement, collective centers etc. It encompasses the *tracking* of IDPs who are primarily displaced from the place of origin by the event of natural disaster and *monitoring* the services, assistance, access and protection provided or catered by the government, inter-governmental organizations, international non-governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, community based organizations, and civil societies. Basically, the report consists of the matrix of settlements vs different sectoral issues highlighting the protection and assistance provided to the IDPs" (IOM, n.d.).

³⁸ Interview with Anita Wadud, project development and program coordinator of IOM, 18 July 2011

providing them with an ongoing 'safety net' in terms of regular remittances and other support (IOM 2010, p.12).

So when it comes to the left behind families, the IOM is aware of the remittances and support they receive –within their organization’s focus-, but not of the situation of the ones who left –beyond the organization’s focus. Again, the awareness of a relationship or nexus is present, which is clearly hard to grapple with.

The UNDP is involved in the Environment and Sustainable Development Cluster which is dedicated to facilitate mainstreaming sustainable development in Bangladesh through the integration of pro-poor environment in policies and development planning (UNDP, 2010c). The Ministry of Environment is thus an important partner in this Cluster (ibid.). Projects on sustainable land management and community based adaptation come closest to helping potential displaced persons become more resilient. Asked after their specific involvement with climate change induced displacement, two programs were mentioned by the UNDP. The UNDP takes care of the Early Recovery within another cluster. From the beginning they try to move from emergency help to early recovery response, where the focus is more on livelihood issues and where, due to its extended mandate, they can take care of the development issues of the displaced people at the same time³⁹. Another initiative is the building of 16.000 cyclone resilient homes after cyclone Sidr within the United Nations Development Assistance Framework⁴⁰. Also, after cyclone Aila, a pilot program was launched, within which three disaster resilient habitats were build to house the displaced people. The habitats consisted of community-driven villages surrounded by two embankments with high palm trees to break the wind, raised houses to prevent flooding, and livelihood opportunities such as fruit trees and fishery to be created inside the embankments⁴¹. So the displacement issue is addressed, be it within a broader program on early recovery response.

It seems to be hard for the organizations to directly address the issue of climate change refugees in specific programs, yet both IOM and the UNDP are anticipating a change of mind at the Government level. One of the main drives of the UNDP, is to establish a paradigm shift at the government level, in disaster management thinking, from emergency relief to disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation (UNDP, 2010b). *“Rather than relief, you should come up with development program. People can stand on their own (...) It is distressful and you make people cripple when you are offering relief”*⁴². The GoB has been mainly focussed on relief work after

³⁹ Interview with highly placed official at UNDP, 18 July 2011

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

disasters instead of on risk reduction. Providing food for cash and so on. Therefore, Bangladeshi politicians as of now are not attuned to human needs: *“They are thinking only in terms of riverbank embankment and the protection. They don’t think of the peoples other way of solution. That’s the thing”*⁴³. So even though surveys have been done, and the situation is known, the problem is not being addressed. In this regard it is the UNDP’s job and responsibility to try and alert the government: *“the government needs some new kind of ideas, new knowledge: how to resolve this problem”*⁴⁴. So UNDP is working on governance, policy awareness programs to sensitize this people, the ministers, the MPs, the parliament to mainstream climate change, environment and poverty (UNDP, 2010c).

In line with their ‘minimalist’ position – considering climate change as one of many reasons to migrate- the IOM thinks climate induced displacement should become integrated in Bangladesh’ overall migration management policy as well as into national policies on development, Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), environment and climate change (IOM 2010, p.ix) and this should be a priority for policymakers. One of the IOM’s central objectives to manage climate change then, is to facilitate migration as an adaptation strategy to climate change, thereby *“maximizing the benefits and minimizing the risks of human mobility”* (IOM 2010, p.v). This is different from the Governments current stance on the issue (focussed on relief work and advocating out-migration) and thus similar to the paradigm shift the UNDP is envisaging. The IOM too makes a number of initial suggestions on policy measures: to minimize forced migration and protect the displaced, and to support migration as adaptation. The focus of the first policy measures is primarily at risk reduction and mitigation in areas of origin while the latter is more focused on the positive side of migration. Both organizations’ programs and policy suggestions are helping climate change refugees to some extent, but they remain broad programs and people moving beyond the focus area of the organizations seem to fall of the radar.

Claims of interpretive community 1 and their meaning within policy context

From the above a number of conclusions can be drawn with regard to the Dhaka-based international organizations included in interpretive community 1 (from now on IC1) as well as the broader policy landscape in Bangladesh. It appears that policy action can be undertaken in different ways. One is to look for ways to include climate refugees in laws, be they existing ones or new ones to be made especially for climate refugees. Another way is to include them in policy programs, be they existing ones or new ones to be made especially for climate refugees. UNDP and IOM claim to be restrained to directly address the issue either way. They constitute an interpretive community because of their choice of categorizing “climate change refugees” not as refugees but as “migrants” or “displaced”

⁴³ Interview with highly placed official at UNDP, 18 July 2011

⁴⁴ Ibid.

which renders them unprotected by existing legislative frameworks. This deficiency is legitimized by their human rights approach to the issue: customary legislation is applicable to them as citizens of Bangladesh and migration can be seen as a positive livelihood and adaptation strategy. An exclusive law is thus excluded from the IC1 framework as a possible solution. Nevertheless, the proposition to develop a ‘safety net’ measure, seems to indicate that even if people are right-bearers, they still need this sort of last resort-like measures to survive. Moreover, although within the organizations’ programs on relief aid and disaster management the needs of environmental migrants or displaced persons are addressed, there are no specific programs or proposals directly targeted at climate refugees. Both organizations are aware of this legitimacy deficit. The IOM claims a lack of enough data on the issue and a (subsequent) lack of donor interest restricts their conduct. The UNDP is aware of the existence of the issue and sees it as their responsibility to alarm the Government, but as of yet nothing is being done. So IC1 claims the Government to be responsible and secondary they themselves to bring the issue to the forefront. All in all, the image emerges of two organizations who are well aware of the fact that they are in a position to help, and do so to some extent through their own programs, yet have trouble to figuring out how to integrate the issue into their own framework as well as that of the Government and donors.

To find out why IC1 makes the claims it makes, what meaning⁴⁵ they have for IC1 members and whether they are based on prejudice or facts, I will now assess them within the context within which they were formed. First, with regard to their use of the term environmental migrant/displaced and their reference to a “nexus”, some arguments support their claim to be cautious with a policy-response to the issue. A number of alternative reasons have been named by policy-relevant actors with regard to migration and its relation with climate change in Bangladesh: ongoing land dispossession of Hindu’s after partition from Pakistan leading to ongoing land feuds⁴⁶; shrimp cultivation causing saline intrusion (besides sea level rise)⁴⁷; ancient Bangladeshi culture of strong social networks and migration⁴⁸; poor infrastructure (congested rivers, weak embankments) aggravating effects of natural disasters⁴⁹; and economic tide causing agriculture to be unprofitable⁵⁰. Indeed, according to Haseeb Irfanullah of Practical Action people shouldn’t tag everything as a consequence of climate change and

⁴⁵ Meanings have conceptual sources: affective, cognitive, and/or moral which correspond to feelings, values and beliefs (Yanow, 2000)

⁴⁶ Interview Mostafa Nuruzzaman, director of Shushilan, 20 July 2011; Interview Mohun Montal, Executive director of LEDARS, July 2011

⁴⁷ Interview Mostafa Nuruzzaman, director of Shushilan, 20 July 2011; Interview Haseeb Irfanullah, Team leader reducing vulnerability and NRM of Practical Action, 19 July 2011

⁴⁸ Interview with research fellow of BCAS, 30 July 2011

⁴⁹ Interview Haseeb Irfanullah, Team leader reducing vulnerability and NRM of Practical Action, 19 July 2011

⁵⁰ Interview with research fellow of BCAS, 30 July 2011; Interview Haseeb Irfanullah, Team leader reducing vulnerability and NRM of Practical Action, 19 July 2011

risk overrating climate change and adaptation⁵¹. In this regard the caution of IC1 with regard to the “nexus” between climate change and displacement seems to be based on a *valuation* of the overall problem-perception in the Bangladesh policy landscape.

With regard to the meanings and reasons behind their second claim – there is a need for new knowledge and ideas to trickle down to the Government level before initiatives can be taken- a number of findings are useful to look at. First, IC1 consists of international organizations present in Bangladesh to assist the Government. As such they have a certain position to stick to, a point well formulated by UK’s Department For International Development (DFID): “*I think we mustn’t forget that this is Bangladesh and it is the jurisdiction of the government to manage its own country. So it is important for donors when they come into a country to work with the government. So I wouldn’t say well they therefore impede us or make it easier: that’s what we’ve got*”⁵². Also, in Bangladesh’ culture the boss of any organization is an authoritative figure who everyone else has to seek admission with before being able to act⁵³. This was observed by myself as well through working in a 100% Bangladeshi organization and visiting numerous others. Also, especially government officials seemed to be held in high esteem. At the occasions I attended where government officials were present, a majority of people in the room would rise to their feet and only sit down after the official had⁵⁴. As both the IOM and the UNDP have close ties with the Government of Bangladesh it can be said that their claim is based on a well-founded *valuation* of and *belief* in the efficiency of the relationship with the Government.

However, another finding from my research is how, according to some, in Bangladesh there seems to be a “*clique*” or a “*niche*” of experts who dominate the climate change discourse⁵⁵. As climate change has become a hot topic over the years, the area has become “*loaded with money*” which has attracted a lot of people: “*Climate change is about money, politics, power, talk shows, television, interviews*”⁵⁶. This finding is corroborated by statements of Haseeb Irfanullah of Practical Action: “*Particularly just before Copenhagen (...) numerous NGOs were trying to prove themselves as being experts on climate change because they got a feeling that, (...) huge amount of fund would be flowing to Bangladesh*”⁵⁷. According to the high official of IUCN this created a situation of constant competition between the experts on climate change issue, and divided them into isolated niches which

⁵¹ Interview Haseeb Irfanullah, Team leader reducing vulnerability and NRM of Practical Action, 19 July 2011

⁵² Interview with official of DFID, July 2011. Even though the statement refers to donors abroad, I think it is safe to assume that the same goes for international organizations

⁵³ Interview with highly placed official of IUCN, 21 July 2011

⁵⁴ Observations made at: Climate Change Conference at Press Club in Dhaka, July 2011; meeting of NGOs with parliamentarian of Environment, August 2011

⁵⁵ Interview with highly placed official of IUCN, 21 July 2011

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Interview Haseeb Irfanullah, Team leader reducing vulnerability and NRM of Practical Action, 19 July 2011

did not talk to each other. Other experts from more remote places like Chittagong or Cox Bazaar were therefore unable to compete with the “*big mouths*” in Dhaka and thus “*dive down*”⁵⁸. The government is part of that clique or following the mainstream, which is problematic as they don’t fulfill the neutral, broad-based, open type of mediating role that you would expect from them⁵⁹. Furthermore, because the discourse has become somewhat “*crude, cheap, and complex*”⁶⁰ the government doesn’t really see the big picture, and as there is a lot of money involved, the clique of experts keeps up a “*smokescreen*” for the political leaders in order to maintain their own status, money and power⁶¹. One of the major problems with regard to climate change issues then, has become the lack of coordination and the lack of a coherent vision due to the scattered elements. Indeed throughout interviews, when I asked people what would be necessary to do something (more) for climate refugees, one of the most heard answers was a need for coordination amongst organizations and within the government⁶². This might be the reason why UNDP and IOM claim that for something to happen at the GoB, there is the need for some “*new ideas, new knowledge*”⁶³, to “*trickle down*’ to the working level”⁶⁴.

Taking these findings into consideration, there can be two (more) answers to the question why IC1 would frame the issue the way they do. First, IC1 might be just as uncertain as the Government about the climate change displacement issue as they might be blinded by the same ‘smokescreen’. On the one hand, to me, this seems quite unlikely as both organizations of IC1 have years of experience in the field, worldwide connections and access to information on the issue besides the information offered by experts in Dhaka. On the other hand, a statement expressed by IC1, was how there was a lack of local case studies besides the broad based predictions⁶⁵. If they depend for this kind of information provision on the expert organizations in Dhaka, then there might be some bias in what they do and do not know, and thus in their *valuation* of the situation. A second, totally different explanation would be, that as they are involved in climate change issues themselves and work close to the ‘clique of experts’ in Dhaka, they might be prejudiced and *believe* their status as influential players in the field to be more important than a coordinated problem approach. Moreover, as climate change displacement remains a thorny issue on international level, it seems as if it would be at least convenient for IC1 not to encourage the issue becoming a high priority for the Government. The luxurious buildings of both organizations, their location in Dhaka, and their use of language resembling the international discourse make it plausible. In conclusion, if indeed such a thing as a

⁵⁸ Interview with highly placed official of IUCN, 21 July 2011

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Amongst others: official of Concern, Mostafa Nuruzzaman (Sushilan), and Haseeb Irfanullah (Practical Action)

⁶³ Interview with highly placed official at UNDP, 18 July 2011

⁶⁴ Interview with Anita Wadud, project development and program coordinator of IOM, 18 July 2011

⁶⁵ Ibid.; IOM, 2010

clique of experts and a smokescreen exists, then IC1 has a perfect excuse to hide behind to uphold the good relationship with the government and/or maintain their own position: we did not know how to *value* the situation, the Government did not know how to *value* the situation, so we did not do anything. On the other hand, smokescreen or not, due to Bangladesh' many problems (man-made and natural) there might actually be more reasons to climate change displacement than just the one which makes IC1's cautious *evaluation* of the issue more reasonable.

Finally, IC1 claimed to be restrained in their conduct by the agenda's of donors. This is reflected in the prospective solutions they suggest. First, IC1 excludes the design of a climate refugee law as a plausible solution; customary civil law is sufficient protection for these people. IC1 *believes* the incorporation of climate change refugees within development and migration programs and other existing arrangements to be the best solution to the policy-issue. However, their activities have a projectized character and they have to make clear to the donor what theme they are working on, with what target group, with what results etc. to gain funding. With regard to climate refugees as a target group for policy, the problem lies exactly in the fact that they are hard to target and monitor because they move around. So although it might be argued that climate change refugees are included in development and relief programs, these programs can be said to be too limited to help them when they move over greater distances and –quite literally- of the radar of organizations and donors. In this regard, IC1's claim that in their policy activities they are constrained by donor's agendas is reasonable. IC1 then *values* their own focus and approach to different societal issues, and *believes* the donor constraints to be limiting their scope of policy activities with regard to climate refugees.

4. Interpretive community 2: organizations in remote, disaster-prone areas

The Association of Climate Refugees (ACR), its partner NGO Satkhira Unnayan Sangstha (SUS), Gono Kalyan Sangstha (GKS) and the Local Environment Development and Agricultural Research Society (LEDARS) can be seen as members of the same interpretive community. First, all organizations are involved in remote, disaster-prone districts in the North-West and South-West coastal areas of Bangladesh which gives them hands-on experience of climate change impacts. Second, they recognize that climate change refugees are in an extremely disadvantaged position and use specific labels to indicate this. Third, they advocate and implement practical solutions to benefit climate change refugees. Fourth, they believe this should not be seen as a form of charity but as their fundamental human right. Fifth, they believe that although international and regional actors, and the Government certainly have a role to play, local communities themselves and organizations are best fit to take on the job.

Organization

The Association of Climate Refugees (ACR) based in Khulna consists of 200 community-based NGOs throughout Bangladesh and was founded in December 2007. Its chief mission is to protect climate displaced people and find durable, sustainable residential solutions for people who have already been displaced by climate change. This is mostly done through the acquisition of new land (Displacement Solutions, 2011). The head quarters of ACR are in Khulna city in an apartment building tucked away between stores. The interior is very neat, with a number of computers and a printer, fans and proper seats and desks. The website of ACR has a very modern design and is in English, yet most of the pages are not working or under construction. The ACR also has a twitter account, and an official fan page on Facebook with Youtube clips to view: all popular social network media. The YouTube canal airs seven clips, showing inundated houses, and people in need. The website, and in particular one publication made by Dutch photographer Kadir van Lohuizen, all show pictures of desperate-looking people working and living on land and in improvised huts or houses engulfed by water. All the pictures in the publication are in black and white and have a sharp focus on people's faces. Most of the pictures on the website too are in black and white or otherwise really grim and show rickety, bamboo houses on embankments. The image appears of ACR as an organization that is well aware of the ways of the world and knows how to talk the talk and walk the walk. They want to highlight the human face of climate change and make it known to a broader public and do so through the use of popular, global

channels. The website being “under construction” added to the idea of a local organization fervently building itself an image or profile, recognizable to the world outside of Bangladesh⁶⁶.

One thing all organizations clearly have in common is their location and working field in the disaster prone parts of the country⁶⁷ (see annex 5). Satkhira Unnayan Sangstha (SUS) is an NGO, allied with ACR, which was established in 1982 in a rural village in the coastal district of Satkhira within the Khulna division. Their chief mission is to work together with the people, especially the hardcore poor and women, to help them become aware of the values, dignity and rights of every human being and help them take action to improve their socio-economic development (SUS 2009, p.5). Their main working areas are the districts of Satkhira, Khulna and Jessore (ibid.) which are prone to storm surges and floods (see annex 3). SUS has five branch offices on its own land, out of the total 20 branch offices it possesses (ibid., p.30). They also possess two mini-vans, 5 cameras, and 13 computers (ibid.). The SUS’ head office is a three storied building in the rural area surrounding Khulna city. The building itself is surrounded by a sort of courtyard, is very spacious yet not very luxurious. The room we were received in was very neat with a big desk for the Director, SUS’ programme posters on the wall and comfortable seats. The level of English used by the staff and the English used in the SUS 2008/2009 report was quite mediocre. Altogether, due to its location and its many offices in the field, and its sober but large head office the organization seemed to be very much in touch with the community they work for. The equipment and the land they possess, the neat Annual report, indicate they also have the capacity to implement programs.

Satkhira, Khulna and Jessore districts also constitute the work area of LEDARS who have their headquarters in Khulna and are active in seven *upazila*’s⁶⁸. LEDARS is a non-profit and non-political organization that has been working since 1996 for “*the social, economical and environmental development of the poor and marginal people of the southwest coastal region of Bangladesh*” (LEDARS, n.d. b). The vision of LEDARS is to “*contribute [to] poverty reduction by creating access*

⁶⁶ With regard to organizations’ capacity it is important to mention that ACR, and through them SUS as well, receive funding from “Displacement Solutions” an Australian fund dedicated to find practical and viable housing, land and property solutions for climate displaced persons (Displacement Solutions, 2011). According to their website: with rights-based analysis and remedial measures, displaced persons everywhere can be assisted in a practical manner to return and reclaim their homes, be adequately compensated or be resettled consistent with their human rights (Displacement Solutions, n.d.). Because the mission and objective of the fund is virtually the same as those of ACR, ACR will have a lot less trouble gaining funds for climate refugees than other NGOs or IOs.

⁶⁷ I wasn’t able to visit all organizations and make observations of their offices as the interviews with GKS and LEDARS were conducted over email

⁶⁸ Bangladesh is divided into 7 *bibagh* (divisions): Barisal, Chittagong, Dhaka, Khulna, Rajshahi, Rangpur, and Sylhet. The *bibagh* are divided into 21 *anchal* (regions) which are further divided into 64 *zila* (districts), which are divided into *thana* or *upazila* (sub-districts) which are further divided into unions.

of the poor & marginal public resources through effective community based management” (LEDARS, n.d. e). Currently there are 16 fulltime staff and 26 volunteers employed by the organization to run its program activities. As they work in 7 upazila’s and have quite a large staff, they seem able to run their program activities. Some of the donors they work with are Action Aid Bangladesh and Save the Children Australia, which are quite big funds. However, I could not verify their efficacy as no annual report was available. Their website is very elaborate and every feature works well. The level of English is mediocre. Sentences such as: *“Though the peoples of Bangladesh are not response of adverse climate change but peoples of our country suffering most”* (LEDARS, n.d. d), are not uncommon. The pictures on display are mostly of seminars or conference-like manifestations where you see people standing or sitting behind a desk with behind them a brightly colored banner with Bangla texts. Other pictures show people being given big white bags, possibly with food or seeds in them and children showing their schoolbooks (LEARS, n.d. c). The image occurs of the organization as the benefactor of the local communities which is working to improve their livelihood options and human rights situation.

Gono Kalyan Sangstha was founded in 1985 in Sirajgonj district which is covered by the Jamuna river and a big historical wetland, the *chalanbeel*. The mission of GKS is to ensure basic human needs such as foods, clothes, education, healthcare, shelter and recreational facilities for the disadvantaged, hardcore poor, the ethnic community, *char* and *chalanbeel* dwellers and people living in other geographical vulnerable areas (GKS, 2010). They have a total of 19 offices, divided between head offices, regional, project, branch, field and liaison offices. According to the 2009 Annual report GKS has started working to help the vulnerable people in 6 districts in the North-West of the country namely Sirajgonj, Natore, Pabna, Bogra, Noagaon and Nilphamari (Yesmin, 2010). However on the website of 2010 only Sirajgonj, Natore, Pabna, and Bogra, are not mentioned in which they are active in a total of 24 upazilas and 162 unions. In any case, vulnerability in all the areas is increasing due to drought, river bank erosion and floods (see annex 3). The website works well and has information on mission, vision, organizational hierarchy and the different themes they work on (GKS, 2010). An entire menu is dedicated to “GKS Governance” with submenu’s on the hierarchy within the organization depicted in an organogram, the “delegation of authority”, “ombudsman”, “finance”, and “monitoring” (ibid.). This gives the idea that the organization, possibly because of its quite large scale and scope, is well-aware that good management is essential and adheres to principles as transparency, anti-corruption and accountability to advance this (ibid.). Nevertheless, it remains hard for them to reach their objectives because of the very fact that they are located in a disaster prone area⁶⁹.

⁶⁹ Email interview Saima Yesmin, Executive director of Gono Kalyan Sangstha, July 2011

Policy discourse

Of the organizations in this interpretive community, ACR is very well aware of the consequences of the issues around labeling climate change refugees. ACR makes a clear distinction between climate migrants, climate displaced people, climate refugees, environmental migrants, and environmental refugees (see Table 4). Human mobility is due to either environmental degradation or due to a climate-induced disaster risk or event. A “migrant” has left either individually or with family while the “displaced” and the “refugee” do so with family. The migrant still has land, livelihood and assets left and thus the scope to return; the displaced person has only land left to return to; the refugee has nothing left to return to and is not protected by the law of the land for necessary compensation. The environmental migrant has lost land, house and assets but is protected and compensated by the law of the land (ACR, 2011). Through this elaborate conceptualization estimations of the exact number of refugees by ACR differ significantly from more conventional estimates. The Norwegian Refugee Council, the UN and Reuters all have made estimates after cyclone Aila struck in 2009 of the number of climate displaced. According to Reuters it were 825.000 in Bangladesh. According to the definition of ACR however, it were 200.000⁷⁰. A point emphasized multiple times by Mr. Musa: “*So that’s why, I have said, (...) if we want to monitor climate displacement, then we want to count the number then we have to look at the definition*”⁷¹. So according to ACR, in total a number of 6.5 million Bangladeshi’s is displaced in early 2011, of which 1.5 million can be named climate refugees (Displacement Solutions, 2011).

	<i>Compelled to leave?</i>	<i>Forced to leave?</i>	<i>Alone?</i>	<i>Land?</i>	<i>House?</i>	<i>Return possible?</i>	<i>Compensation?</i>
Climate migrant	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	-
Climate displaced	Y	N	N	Y	N	Y	-
Climate refugee	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N
Environ. migrant	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y
Environ. refugee	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N

Table 4: Climate Refugees: concepts and definitions (ACR, 2011).

⁷⁰ Interview Abu Musa, director and founder of Association of Climate Refugees, 3 August 2011

⁷¹ Ibid.

The other organizations speak of “climate change refugees” (SUS) or “climate refugee” (LEDARS, GKS) as well and mostly refer to people displaced by Aila, Sidr or riverbank erosion. Nevertheless, there is no uniform use of labels nor an elaborate categorization in place to explain which people are or aren’t meant by the definition. Even so, after careful analysis of how climate refugees related to organizations’ target groups, I concluded that they constitute a separate category from other disadvantaged. SUS refers to “climate change refugees” as those people who migrated to the cities after cyclone Aila hit and salinity intrusion made cultivation impossible⁷². Also the surge of coastal waters and cyclone Sidr seems to render people climate refugees. SUS decided to join ACR as they saw how cyclone Sidr and Aila affected the people from the Sundarban and coastal areas, leaving them suffering from a lack of fresh water, salinity intrusion and water logging and without a job or any means to survive. Therefore they decided they needed to help them, the hardcore poor, jointly with ACR⁷³. They seem to be well aware of who exactly they are dealing with. When you search for SUS on Google, the first – and only - hit you’ll get is a single webpage dedicated to “*Save the children in climate refugee families*” (SUS, n.d.). There is only one picture of a poor looking family of 8, standing in the mud before what looks like a tent of clay, plastic and straw. Also a single paragraph is displayed within which a number of villages are described that have fell victim to river bank erosion. The amount of land that has been lost is named, the exact number of families, persons and children is given and an elaborate description of the percentage of school-going children is provided. All in all, the total number of climate refugees is said to be over five-thousand including two-thousand children (ibid.). The numbers and percentages provided in the article are very precise, and where large-scale organizations are more likely to refer to vulnerable ‘districts’ or ‘regions’, here a particular village and *upazila* are named. This is also apparent in their annual report with programs targeted at particular upazillas in Satkhira, Khulna and Jessore. This seems to reflect a close and regular contact with the local affected communities and moreover a recognition of their predicament as that of a climate change refugee. Besides the reasons for migrating, it becomes clear that the type of migration might be permanent as houses and land are lost, migration can be international as India is mentioned, and migration is forced. With regard to the character of the migration, Aila and Sidr, two examples of more frequent occurrence of cyclones, are mentioned.

LEDARS clearly believes there to be a relation between climate change and displacement and refer to the south-western coastal communities of Satkhira and Khulna district as the “*frontline victims of climate change*” (LEDARS, 2011). These people migrated due to Aila, as well as due to rising sea levels causing salinity intrusion and unstable embankments which make agriculture and a sustainable

⁷² Interview Ekman Ali, Director SUS, 3 August 2011

⁷³ Ibid.

livelihood impossible⁷⁴. Also, riverbank erosion, various natural disasters and unplanned shrimp cultivation are named, which have compelled the coastal people to migrate to the urban areas or toward more fruitful agricultural sites in search of jobs reallocation during the early 1990s (LEDARS, n.d.(d); LEDARS, 2011). In the interview they are called “climate migrant”⁷⁵, in another publication LEDARS lists the “*quick ‘rehabilitation’ of the ‘climate refugees’ of southwest Bangladesh*” as a priority (LEDARS, 2011). With regard to terminology then, LEDARS does not seem to adhere to a particular label as refugee, migrant or displaced, although they do prefer the label ‘climate’ over ‘environmental’. Also LEDARS seems to point to a number of different causes as possible for climate migration, yet, besides shrimp cultivation almost reasons are related to climate change and according to Mr. Kunan Montal, “*Climate change is 70% responsible for recent migration of south of the Satkhira and Khulna district*”⁷⁶. The type of migration meant by LEDARS remains vague; no mention is made of the temporary or permanent, internal or international character of the migration. With regard to the character of the migration it can be found that LEDARS subscribes to both man-made (shrimp cultivation) as well as natural (sea-level rise) causes of migration, which seems to imply that people can have several reasons to migrate.

Gono Kalyan Sangstha uses different labels for climate change refugees such as ‘migrated/refugee people’, ‘shelterless people’, ‘floating people’, ‘displacement people’ or ‘climate refugee’⁷⁷. The organization says it does deal with them and most answers to questions regarding climate refugees referred to the hardcore poor living in the chars and chalonbeel areas, vulnerable families living on the embankments, and those homeless due to riverbank erosion. In this case, Ms. Yesmin referred to a Vulnerability Capacity Assessment and a Baseline survey:

*VCA (Vulnerability Capacity Assessment) findings in the project locations of GKS indicate that 70% of the people were settled in low land (inundated by moderate flood) and that 60% of these families came from other location where they had previously been made homeless by river bank erosion. Baseline survey data shows that while 71% of households have their own homestead land, the remaining 29% of households are residing on the embankment of the river or khas land (government land). Only 23% of all households have their own cultivable land in the area*⁷⁸.

⁷⁴ Email interview Mohun Montal, Executive director of LEDARS, July 2011

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Email interview Saima Yesmin, Executive director Gono Kalyan Sangstha, July 2011

⁷⁸ Ibid.

From this it becomes clear that the main causes for climate refugees to move according to GKS is river bank erosion and floods, which makes sense considering the North-west, flood-prone area they work in. Also it is suggested that a number of people do not have a house or land to return to. Another comment seems to indicate that seasonal migration is a way to deal with their hardship: *“During rainy season/after flood earning male members go elsewhere in search of jobs leaving their wife and children in home for long time due to lack of income sources or employment opportunities”*⁷⁹. However, despite the percentages provided before, it does not become clear how many people exactly have migrated, whether their stay is permanent or temporary, just how forced or voluntary it was, whether the floods and riverbank erosion occurred suddenly or gradual and whether people had one or more reasons to migrate.

In conclusion, SUS, LEDARS and GKS do not display the same awareness of the international labeling issues with regard to climate change refugees as does ACR. However, labeling these people either “climate change refugees” or “climate refugee” does set them apart from the other groups of disadvantaged Bangladesh knows. Whether this attitude has consequences for the kind of solutions they deem necessary will become more clear in the analysis of their policy activities and/or the lack thereof.

Policy activities

The organizations included in this interpretive community all have a strong belief in the basic human rights of the people they help, and in the ability of local organizations and these people to help themselves. Throughout their activities, the ACR proliferates itself as an organization for and by the climate refugees. Mr. Musa emphasized that he was from the area, he grew up here, and he personally knew the people his organization was trying to help. As Bangladesh is well-known for its corruption, any support that ACR gives he said, will be given straight to the climate refugees instead of to some intermediary NGO. Also, every new program they initiate will start out with the organization of climate refugees themselves, after which the organization steps up to help them⁸⁰. This is a strategic choice as well:

Abu Musa believes that it is the affected communities themselves who have the best knowledge and resources for self-protection and adaptation. He also strongly believes that having local communities own the problem is the only way for the Government of Bangladesh to listen to their plight – ‘If we showed up as an NGO describing this problem, the Government door would be immediately closed, it is essential that the local communities take action themselves’, he says with conviction (Leckie e.a., 2011).

⁷⁹ Email interview Saima Yesmin, Executive director Gono Kalyan Sangstha, July 2011

⁸⁰ Interview Abu Musa, director and founder of ACR, 2 August 2011

The local communities should thus fight for their rights and their needs themselves. The ACR strongly believes that, in contrast to the short-term relief support some NGOs offer, the real solution lies in the provision of three things: a house, land, and some assets to generate income⁸¹. This is not kindness, but their right as guaranteed by the constitution of Bangladesh and international institutions⁸². However, although there are huge budgets available in the government, the GoB has not emphasized the rights of these (climate refugee) people yet. According to ACR the people who are being displaced are amongst the poorest of the poor yet this is not recognized by the GoB⁸³. One problem in this respect is the accessibility of land. Bangladesh has a large, growing population and little land left to distribute. The government owns a lot of land but it extends it only to resettle the ‘landless people’ or the ‘poor people’:

But it is almost the same, the climate refugees are also the landless people (...). So for example, say there is a program, so if they target 100 landless people, within that 100 there might be 5 landless people who are climate refugees, others are only very poor. But climate refugees are among the poorest of the poor. They are not given that preference. We want to emphasize that⁸⁴.

The label ‘landless’ attached to this regulation then, seems to exclude climate refugees from gaining access to land. However, in this respect the ACR holds the opinion that, since disaster has become more frequent and severe in Bangladesh, some of the existing laws have come to apply to the case of climate displacement as well. Therefore, instead of focusing merely on the creation of new refugee laws, it is worth taking advantage of existing laws as long as climate refugees’ unique situation is emphasized so their rights and needs will be properly addressed⁸⁵.

The ACR has not been waiting around for the government to notice climate refugees unique situation. According to their major donor *Displacement Solutions*, since the start of 2011 eleven plots of land located in Khulna district, totaling 29 acres have been donated to the ACR by local landowners who sympathized with ACRs objectives to gain “New land for Lost land” (*Displacement Solutions*, 2011). The new community lands will benefit approximately 500 families. Moreover, in Khulna local government officials have pledged to release another 1000 acres of land to ACR for relocation purposes (*ibid.*). Also, the ACR is currently monitoring a number of 1000 families to know why they were displaced, where to, how many kilometers etcetera. In the next two years they want to expand

⁸¹ Interview Abu Musa, director and founder of ACR, 2 August 2011

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

this database to include all of the 6 million climate refugees⁸⁶. Moreover, ACR has started negotiating with the USA and Australia to absorb 1% of the Bangladeshi climate refugees. This support would be a sort of token support. It's a way of saying, well we want to solve the problem mostly within the countries, we don't say you created this problem, or that this should be your 'gift to society' but the international community has some responsibility to share as well⁸⁷. The main idea behind this is thus that ACR will do the in-country resettlement as well as push for resettlement in foreign countries. Whether these negotiations are very formal and serious remains to be seen as I could not find any information about them online and Mr. Musa himself could not suppress a little laughter when he said "*I don't know what the result will be but at least we have been trying*"⁸⁸. All in all ACR conduct and program solutions are very pragmatic. Although ACR has been monitoring climate refugees and has extensive categorization in place to make a case for new refugee laws, working with the tools that are available to them leads to practical solutions.

GKS also recognizes both the lack of government attention and the disproportionately harsh circumstances climate refugees are in. "*The homeless people [through riverbank erosion] are the poorest of the poor; living in sub-human conditions and existing in irregular jobs such as day laboring or share cropping. Their poverty and lack of shelter, a basic human rights, is a matter of great concern*"⁸⁹. Except for the fact that communities in GKS work areas are vulnerable due to geographical vulnerable habitat, they also live in isolation from the mainland which results in a lack of attention and priority for many local government officials. Especially with regard to the *chars* and *chalon beel* inhabitants, their extreme vulnerability to floods, river erosion, and drought, and their need for education, health and sanitation are "*completely neglected and detached from development flow*"⁹⁰. Therefore: "*Poor members of communities frequently lose of their control to their resources and have little access to Government resources and social justice*"⁹¹. This is illustrated by the percentage of households under GKS' surveillance that are residing on the *khas* or government lands and the minority of the households that own their own land. According to GKS one of the measures to help climate refugees would have to be the distribution of these *khas* among them⁹². This brings back the problem of land and access and GKS as well recognizes that although 'shelterless people/floating people' are most vulnerable in terms of social security, food security and unable to meet their basic rights, yet so far there is no policy for climate refugees⁹³. Executive director Saima Yesmin is of the

⁸⁶ Interview Abu Musa, director and founder of ACR, 2 August 2011

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Email interview Saima Yesmin, executive director Gono Kalyan Sangstha, July 2011

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

opinion that pressure should be created to formulate a new law to help displaced people⁹⁴. Although GKS and ACR have a different opinion when it comes to regulation for climate refugees, both are convinced that something more should be done to emphasize the extreme predicament they are in and to put them on the map of policymakers. They both make an appeal to the basic human rights of these people and that a possible solution lies in the distribution of government land.

GKS' concern with the most underprivileged in society is reflected in the main themes they work on: sustainable livelihood, human rights and good governance, environment and disaster, and human resource development (GKS, 2010). Within these themes, they have programs on local governance as well as several initiatives to reduce the migration during and after floods (ibid.). One program they have is disaster risk reduction within which they focus on the roles and linkages between different levels of governance and the vulnerable communities. This way institutional capacity can be strengthened, the 'access vulnerability' of people can be reduced, and their socio-economic situation can be improved (ibid.). Another program, called Sustainable Integrated Livelihood Program, works for the community people, to help them during and after disasters. Members of civil society wanting to fight corruption and injustice, formed the Sachaton Nagoric Jote (SNJ), a youth parliament organized to discuss problems relating to human rights, family law and alternative dispute resolution, arrange dialogue between civil society in political leaders, and eventually to find solutions (ibid.). Another GKS activity includes creating employment opportunities right after disasters such as Cash For Work, Food for Work, and distribution of relief goods⁹⁵. Finally, GKS has, together with local government unit, and the citizen committee, identified 65 of the most vulnerable families (mostly female headed households) living on the embankment and has constructed two cluster villages, villages raised higher than the previous highest level of flood, to help them. These cluster villages provide access to safe drinking water and hygienic sanitation facilities. The women are involved in income generating activities such as homestead gardening and poultry rearing⁹⁶. The overall aim of GKS programs is thus to strengthen the position of the most vulnerable people, among which are climate refugees, to gain access to (government) resources. Although the GKS is not actively distributing land, they do acknowledge it as a suitable solution and they do provide new housing and income generating activities. Just as with ACR the people organize themselves and are encouraged to do so through GKS programs. Even without specific mentioning of climate refugees then, the policy activities of GKS are targeted at those people described as being climate refugees in the interview and their extreme predicament is addressed.

⁹⁴ Email interview Saima Yesmin, executive director Gono Kalyan Sangstha, July 2011

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

As mentioned before LEDARS believes that climate refugees should be rehabilitated and moreover they demand “*all necessary measures to protect southwest coastal communities as they are the frontline victims of climate change*”⁹⁷. They believe that what people need most are programs which tackle the livelihood crisis and help to gain or preserve fresh drinking water⁹⁸. Even though the people moving from the coastal areas are mostly unaware of climate change, LEDARS is convinced they do possess the local adaptation mechanisms to secure their livelihood⁹⁹. Therefore LEDARS’ vision, as stated before, is to contribute to poverty reduction by creating access to public resources for the poor and marginal through effective community based management (LEDARS, n.d. e). They want to achieve this by: “*devise people with appropriate methods to raise voice for establishing basic and human rights in order to ensure livelihood security of the most vulnerable and socially excluded segment of the population*” (LEDARS, n.d. e). To this effect, LEDARS has initiated the SIDR Responding Program, SIDR Rehabilitation Program, Aila emergency response program, Early recovery programme of Aila, Rights alliance in the Southwest coastal region, Awareness raising on climate change, and Community based adaptation to climate change in Southwest coastal region of Bangladesh (LEDARS, n.d. b). The Sidr and Aila programs were mostly aimed at relief aid. The Rights Alliance is initiated to defend rights of the poor and marginal people through building capacity of the NGOs in southwest coastal region of Bangladesh. Although this program is not specifically targeted at climate change refugees, the organization does acknowledge the marginal position climate refugees in southwest Bangladesh are in and through these programs they will be able to apply for help. The raising awareness and community based adaptation programs both very specifically target communities vulnerable to climate change and try to ensure their socio-economic stability and prevent migration. It does so through initiating a network of local development organizations because LEDARS believes that conservation of coastal environment and building adaptation capacity for the climate-vulnerable community is not possible without a greater movement of civil societies and local development organizations (LEDARS, n.d. a).

In addition, LEDARS is currently busy setting up an adaptation centre situated in the Southwest coastal region. The center is aimed at the provision of training, research, information, to scale up the coping and adaptation mechanisms of the people (LEDARS, n.d.a). Because even though people in the community have “*indigenous coping mechanisms*”, they don’t always possess the right skills or the appropriate technology¹⁰⁰. Even though LEDARS believes developed countries to be responsible for climate change and they should make a contribution, NGOs should be the main

⁹⁷ Email Interview Mohun Kunan Mondal, executive director LEDARS, July 2011

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

executer of the programs, helped by international, regional and local actors because: *“The local organization is well aware about the culture, trends, tendency, views of local people. They could better serve for the community and it do not need huge resources”*. So again, the local communities play an important role as well as the local NGOs in the advocacy for and extension of help. Next to that, the programs they offer are aimed at human rights defense and practical relief aid, which is in line with the activities of GKS and ACR. Moreover, LEDARS too clearly recognizes how climate change refugees are amongst the most vulnerable of the population.

A number of SUS’ objectives include: empowerment of the underprivileged people to take responsibility for improving their socio-economic situation and improving their ability to protect their rights and privileges; mobilizing local resources and help people set up a model of sustainable development within which people can enjoy equal rights and an equal share of available resources; and help people rehabilitate themselves in case of both natural and man-made disaster (SUS 2009, p.5). This is quite a challenge as it is stated in the SUS report: *“These areas are characterized by poor communication facilitates poor education, lack of health support, acute shortage of safe drinking water, soil salinization, its location with the Indian border, higher dependency of the Sundarban resulting in chronic poverty among the people”* (SUS 2009, p.3). Moreover the South-West Coastal Bangladesh is quite isolated from the required development initiatives by the Government (ibid.; see annex 5). SUS provides practical solutions to help people overcome their hardship: SUS as well lobbied with the government to release their land, and they provide housing and income generating activities suitable for the Aila flooded area with donor support from ACR¹⁰¹. Also after Aila, SUS provided pure drinking water and cooking materials (ibid., p.26). SUS has a separate fund for relief programs and disaster management as well as for sudden help to flood affected people (ibid., p.24). They have one specific program on ‘climate resilience and disaster response’ with two components. First, it includes an awareness campaign about environment, climate change, climate change adaptation facilitation, and climate change induced disaster. Second, it includes disaster response and rehabilitation work as well as adaptation promotion (ibid., p.24). Activities within this program include: Sidr rehabilitation, flood rehabilitation which includes emergency relief, repairing of houses, construction of flood houses, sanitation facilities, blankets, livestock and agriculture rehabilitation, cash for work, and providing emergency loans (ibid., p.25). For example SUS with help of upazila administratives and local government representatives mobilized thousands of flood affected people to voluntarily remove silt and clay from the Kapatakha river to facilitate the pass-through of flood-water (ibid., p.26). This shows how the local community is mobilized to help themselves. The activities are aimed at the ‘jobless’ and the ‘affected people’ of the Sidr and Aila cyclones and flood, without them

¹⁰¹ Interview Ekman Ali, director SUS, 3 August 2011

being specifically mentioned as climate refugees. Asked who was the main person, institution or organization responsible for climate change refugees according to SUS the answer was the government. However *“the government’s initiative is not bad but the government is very poor and has not available good manpower; therefore NGOs are doing a better job”*¹⁰². The practical solutions SUS provides are in line with those of ACR, as they too advocate for land release and provide housing and income generating activities. Their objectives and activities emphasize the rights of people to equal share of resources. Moreover the responsibility of the local community to help themselves is emphasized as well as the ability of local NGOs to help in contrast to the government. Even though climate refugees are not specifically named, SUS does recognize their predicament and has programs that are clearly aimed at the people described in the interview as climate refugees and not at other disadvantaged.

Claims of interpretive community 2 and their meaning within policy context

As has become clear of all organizations operating in remote, disaster-prone areas included in interpretive community 2 (from now on IC2), ACR has the most comprehensive stance on the labeling and legislative issue, while other organizations don’t use one label exclusively nor an elaborate categorization to explain which people are or aren’t meant by the definition. However, again, there are two ways to understand ‘action’: include climate refugees in (new or existing) laws, or include climate refugees in (new or existing) policy programs and activities. With regard to the first approach the ACR is most clear on the issue: make use of existing laws besides solely fighting for a new one. This is the feature where the other organizations differ most from ACR. However, with regard to the second approach, all organizations clearly recognize the extremely vulnerable position climate refugees are in and the lack of proper attention for the issue. Moreover, even though they aren’t mentioned explicitly in program descriptions, from interviews and descriptions of target groups it became clear that they are deliberately included in organizations’ climate change and/or post-disaster policies, which sets them apart from other disadvantaged groups. The existing solutions are practical: provision of land and/or housing and/or income generating activities/assets. When organizations answered that more should be done the envisaged solutions were also alike: release of government land. In this respect there is a clear similarity between the organisations. Another feature all organizations have in common is how they try to arrange access to resources for vulnerable people. The resources differ between land, housing and income generating activities and/or assets. This provides a way for people to become more resilient. Moreover they highlight that this is not charity but their basic human right. Through text and images they try and show the human face of climate change. What is remarkable is how all organizations focus on the agency of people themselves: ‘to raise their voice’, ‘help them become

¹⁰² Interview Ekman Ali, director SUS, 3 August 2011

aware', 'help them take action' and 'help the people rehabilitate themselves'. Thus this interpretive community strongly believes in the agency of the local community to improve their situation. In conclusion, not only have the organisations acknowledged the effects of climate change on migration, they have come up with practical solutions to help these people –be they climate refugees, climate migrants, or displaced people. And in the case of ACR and SUS, access to funding to implement their ideas is established.

The most important claims of IC2 are thus that climate refugees are among the poorest of the poor, they need more attention and access to resources, and local NGOs and communities are best fit to help them. To find out why they make these claims, what meaning they have for IC2 members and to what extent they are based on prejudice or facts, I will now assess these claims against the background of the context within which they were shaped. The first two claims –climate change refugees are among the poorest of the poor and need more attention and practical help- can be assessed using the point of view of climate refugees themselves: as labels often reveal more about the process of authoritative designation than about the characteristics of the labelled, this will uncover to what extent used labels are deliberately misrepresenting the situation and the role of the labelled (Wood, 1985). The duration of stay of the five persons I interviewed in Dhaka varied from 13 years to 30 years to 'a very long time ago' but all of the climate refugees migrated (among other reasons) due to riverbank erosion and subsequent loss of land. Three persons claimed to have never received help from NGOs, Government, or other institutions¹⁰³. In Khulna of the five families I interviewed, four families had been there for a duration between 2 months and four years, three of them due to Aila which inundated their land for good and made it impossible for the farmers and fishermen to do their job. This corroborated the finding that the most vulnerable population are the ones living in the coastal areas and are the ones who are dependent on the natural resource base for their livelihood like farmers and fishermen¹⁰⁴. In almost all of the stories of the people I spoke to, were it in Dhaka or in Khulna, land and livelihood were named as priority needs and this had also become clear through interviews with other actors. Of the 11 people I spoke to, six said never to have had any kind of support from the government, local NGOs or whatsoever. A number of people I spoke to were now employed as daily laborer or rickshaw puller and many expressed a wish to own an (agricultural) business if they had the chance¹⁰⁵. So in conclusion, especially riverbank erosion and cyclone Aila seem to be¹⁰⁶ the major causes of displacement. The most important needs of climate refugees seem to be, ownership of land

¹⁰³ Interview inhabitants Karwan Bazar in Dhaka city, July 2011

¹⁰⁴ Interview inhabitants Ambita Bazar and Daulatpur Bazar in Khulna city, August 2011

¹⁰⁵ Interviews inhabitants Karwan Bazar in Dhaka city and Ambita Bazar and Daulatpur Bazar in Khulna city

¹⁰⁶ As I was able to talk to only 11 families in a country with possibly millions of displaced I found it incorrect to draw solid conclusions

and assets so they can start their own agricultural business and become self-sufficient. Even without support of anyone some climate change refugees have been able to build a new livelihood somewhere else if the old one is destroyed. Applying this knowledge to IC2 claims, it follows that IC2 seems to know their situation well and is responsive to the needs of climate change refugees. The recognition of climate refugees and the call for practical help then, can be said to be based *valuation* of the situation of climate change refugees.

The meanings and reasons behind their third claim – local NGOs and communities are best fit to help climate change refugees- can be sought in the location of IC2 members in the disaster prone areas themselves, and the widespread corruption in Bangladesh. First, the organizations all have personal experience with climate refugees working in the area and a part of its staff originates from there: ACR is located in Khulna city a place where a of lot of climate change refugees have sought refuge, SUS described how they joined ACR after having witnessed the consequences of cyclone Sidr on the lives of people¹⁰⁷ and GKS has trouble reaching their objectives because of the very fact they operate in a disaster prone area¹⁰⁸. Moreover, besides witnessing people becoming displaced from natural disasters, the GoB regularly clears illegally inhabited government lands of (climate) migrants and poor¹⁰⁹. IC2's claim to want to take responsibility and action can thus be said to be based on an *emotional* attachment with the communities they work for. Second, the work they do is focussed on climate change and its effects on the communities. As they know from firsthand experience what these effects are and what the climate change refugees need, their programs are targeted at specific communities. You might therefore argue that they know well how to target these people as a policy group in need of funding. Especially in the case of ACR and its allied organizations, being able to rely on the funding of Displacement Solutions would seemingly make it easier to accomplish the set objectives, yet I must say I was not able to verify this argument with donors. This might be able to strengthen the *belief* in IC1s own capacities. Nevertheless, and despite their self-reliance, a crucial point to make her is how the solution they propose, the release of government land, is very much dependent on the will of the government to take responsibility and on its capacity to provide the asked resources. Even though IC2 claims responsibility for helping climate refugees then, for the solution they prefer the responsibility lies with the government.

In this regard, it might be argued that the emphasis on self-empowerment of communities is a mere necessity as the areas are so remote from external (government) resources and corruption is still wielding. According to Mostafa Nuruzzaman of Shushilan:

¹⁰⁷ Interview Ekman Ali, director SUS, 3 August 2011

¹⁰⁸ Email interview Saima Yesmin, executive director Gono Kalyan Sangstha, July 2011

¹⁰⁹ Interview inhabitants of Khulna city, August 2011; Khan, 2011

*The existing socio-political institutions including political parties belong to the influential and rich section of the society and are dominated by the propertied class. The poor have no access to these institutions and hence they are deprived of the facilities provided by the state and the society*¹¹⁰.

According to some, there seems to be a lack of knowledge on the local government level on how to deal with climate displacement: “*They [ministers] are thinking only in terms of riverbank embankment and the protection. They don’t think of the peoples other way of solution*”¹¹¹. These are some of the reasons why political commitment of local officials to the community is inadequate. According to BCAS’ Golam Rabbani for example: “*There are many national level organizations, they’re sitting in Dhaka, they plan it, they provide input to the plan, and they develop the plan, but the involvement of the local level institutions are much less*”¹¹². Indeed, in several newspaper articles I read, after a case of riverbank erosion a local government official of the Water Development Board would have been contacted to deal with the issue and the reply would be along the lines of: ‘We recently sent a message to the higher authorities and we are awaiting reply’¹¹³. All in all, there seems to be a level of disconnect between Dhaka and the field¹¹⁴. The following statements were often heard: “there is a knowledge gap”¹¹⁵ and “there is a lack of linkage, there is a mismatch”¹¹⁶. In conclusion, because the engagement of Government departments with the community seems to be wanting and resources lacking due to a level of disconnect between Dhaka and the field, local communities and organizations might *feel* some resentment against the government for not helping out their people and seem to *value* and *believe* in their own capacity to help them more than that of the government.

Taking these findings into account, there may be two (more) explanations for IC2 to frame the issue the way they do. First, local organizations may be not that focused on labeling issues as there is a lack of knowledge exchange and therefore a lack of awareness of the implication of labeling. However, if you take into account that climate change has become booming business, and the fact that several organizations have liaison offices in Dhaka, then maybe this is a well-known fact in the more remote areas as well. Using the label climate change indiscriminately then, might be a way for less capable, remote organizations to channel resources and funding towards all disadvantaged groups in the area instead of just to climate change refugees as they *believe* this is the only way to gain funding.

¹¹⁰ Interview Mostaffa Nuruzzaman, director Shushilan, 20 July 2011. Statement supported by high official of IUCN and by Abu Musa, ACR.

¹¹¹ Interview highly placed official of UNDP, 18 July 2011; supported by research fellow of BCAS, July 2011

¹¹² Statement supported by S.n., 2011(e) and S.n., 2011(d)

¹¹³ Statement supported by S.n., 2011a; S.n., 2011c; S.n., 2011b; S.n., 2011(e)

¹¹⁴ Interview high official of IUCN, 21 July 2011

¹¹⁵ Interview Abu Musa, director and founder of ACR, 2 August 2011

¹¹⁶ Interview Mostaffa Nuruzzaman, director Shushilan, 20 July 2011

I find the latter argument hard to sustain as the target groups described by the organizations are people displaced by climate change and funding in Bangladesh seems to be scarce no matter how you label the people. Moreover, as the issue is no priority with the government yet, but one amongst many problems this argument does not seem very plausible. Nevertheless, the mere possibility of such prejudice in IC2 framework renders it necessary to take it into consideration when comparing frameworks.

Chapter 5 Comparison: differences and similarities between interpretive communities

There are a number of differences and similarities between the two interpretive communities. The first difference is related to the way they value the situation of climate change refugees and their knowledge of and/or prejudice regarding the policy-issue. The claims of IC1 seem to be based on: either a proper valuation of the multi-causal, multi-faceted character of “environmental displacement” in Bangladesh, or on a biased valuation upheld by Dhaka experts, and/or intentionally upheld by IC1 themselves to maintain their influential position and good relations with both the GoB and the international community. IC2 on the other hand seems to base its claims on a first-hand valuation of “climate (change) refugees” life-stories. The difference between these frames is quite significant. IC1 has a strong argument against claims for help from IC2: we need to know climate change refugees exist for sure for us to start spending effort and resources on the policy-issue. Nevertheless, both interpretive communities believe that more attention should be paid to the policy-issue of climate change refugees, and the human rights of disadvantaged people should be respected. Neither community advocates for a specific law though¹¹⁷; both value regular civil law as sufficient for climate refugees to rely on.

The way the communities value the situation of climate refugees has consequences for the way both communities label the issue and the solutions they deem to be proper. IC1 believes knowledge accumulation and awareness raising at the government level to be necessary to gain a greater understanding of “environmental migrants” or “displaced people”. This restrained stance can also be said to be used as an excuse for non-action, as this might be a responsibility they are not willing to take. IC2 on the other hand believes and feels it is necessary to emphasize how their cause for poverty is extreme in relation to the other disadvantaged Bangladesh knows and therefore labels these people “climate change refugees” or “climate refugee”. The current policy activities of IC1 are not (directly) targeted at climate refugees while those of IC2 are. IC1 does recognize the need for relief aid after disasters and recognize the need for development aid to assist poor people, but they do not acknowledge a particular hardship on the part of climate refugees. Although it can be argued that international organizations’ relief aid after Sidr and Aila resembles the policy activities of local organizations at the same events, the big difference is that IC2 clearly recognize the need for such programs for a very particular segment of the disadvantaged population, called “climate (change) refugee”. As a prospective solution then, IC1 believes that the issue of climate change displacement

¹¹⁷ With the exception of GKS

should be mainstreamed within other programs on climate change, migration and/or development to improve their human rights. IC2 on the other hand, believes and feels that structural access to resources such as provision of house, (government) land and income-earning opportunities is and would be the best solution to help climate change refugees. A big difference in this respect is how improved access to resources would be a long-term sustainable solution while inclusion in development programs is usually on a periodic, projectized basis. A significant similarity between the two interpretive communities is how they are both dependent to some extent on Government endorsement of the issue to be able to go through with their policy proposals.

The solutions proposed by both interpretive communities are related to the question of who should take the responsibility to take action. IC1 seems to be aware of the position they are in and the part they can play but have a well-founded valuation of and belief in the efficiency of the relationship with the Government. Another reason rendering IC1 less pro-active, is how they claim to have trouble targeting climate change refugees for policy. Donors as of now are not attuned to the humanitarian side of climate change which is also due to the fact that it is not a government priority. Also as climate refugees move around they are hard to target as a group eligible for donor funding since monitoring and evaluation becomes difficult. IC2 is also well aware of the part they can play on a local level and feel action should be undertaken now and believe local NGOs are in a better position than the government to do so. IC2 consists almost exclusively of independent Non-Governmental Organizations and as they might lack a knowledge exchange with Dhaka, it can be argued they are less bothered by diplomacy in designing their policy response. Nevertheless, for government lands to be released, it is –unsurprisingly– the government’s responsibility to do so. Indirectly then, IC2 as well points to the government as the one responsible for dealing with the issue.

In conclusion, the major difference between IC1 and IC2 use of frameworks is how IC2 reflect and actively represent the ‘human face’ of *climate change refugees* while IC1 sees *environmental displacement* more as a ‘policy-issue’ to be dealt with. The stance of IC1 one then, is restrained and rational: without more scientific evidence and Government acknowledgement, the policy-issue is not prioritized, while the stance of IC2 is more independent and affective: we have everyday proof of the extremely disadvantaged position these people are in and we have to act to keep these people from suffering any longer. This difference is significant because it makes it much easier to debate on an abstract policy-issue than it is to decide over the faith of human beings. Overall though, IC1s framework offers a stronger bargaining position. IC1s work relation with the government can be claimed to actually restrict their conduct, it can be claimed that there actually are multiple causes for migration in Bangladesh which verifies their claim for knowledge accumulation and it can be claimed that they actually do try and improve the human rights of disadvantaged people, amongst which are also climate refugees. Even if they intentionally help to sustain the uncoordinated climate change

debate and the resulting non-action, these arguments are perfect excuses to legitimize their conduct. IC2 on the other hand, cannot legitimize their claims that climate change refugees exist and need help, as the 'real-life stories' are not extensively researched and presented in a coherent manner to policy-relevant actors. Even if there was concrete evidence, as ACR is trying to compile, it is hard for them to get their human rights message across due to the lack of linkage between Dhaka and the field. Finally, according to IC2, climate refugees need sustainable solutions and access to resources now. This seems to be hard to obtain objectives taking into account the short-term focus of the government and the widespread corruption, both of which take a long time to change. This again legitimizes the claim of IC1 that more knowledge accumulation and a change of mind at the government level is needed before action can be undertaken. So even though the main claim of IC2 – it is their human right to receive help- holds a high moral value, it is hard to legitimize the claim that climate refugees need to be prioritized over other right-bearers.

Conclusion

A number of my findings can be related to the international debate and international policy response with regard to climate change refugees. First, in both the international and in the Bangladeshi policy landscape the human face of climate change is slowly starting to reveal itself in debates on climate change. In Bangladesh the Association for Climate Refugees has started to form a collective of NGOs to defend the human rights of climate change refugees, while in the international debate the humanitarian community has advocated for the significance of adaptation measures which resulted in the non-binding “Cancun Agreements” of 2010 (UNHCR, 2011b). Nevertheless, a second conclusion yields that at both the local and international level there still is a request for knowledge on the issue with regard to causation and type of migration. This is understandable and reasonable, since it is important to try and understand a phenomenon before acting rash. However, two crucial findings are worth mentioning in this respect. First, it is difficult to gain a good understanding of the issue of climate change refugees in a country with many environmental, political and socioeconomic problems and a consistent lack of money and resources. As most of the impacts of climate change are felt in developing countries like Bangladesh, I believe it can be argued that the problems with knowledge accumulation are not limited to Bangladesh alone. Second, this deficit of efficient knowledge accumulation can be used as an excuse by opponents of the label climate change refugee to remain on the ‘inactive side’ of the policy-response. For example, the Parties to the UNFCCC 16th COP in Mexico in 2010 have agreed to “*take measures to enhance understanding, coordination and cooperation with regard to climate change induced displacement*” (IOM, 2010). According to my findings, coordination and cooperation are desperately needed so in this respect the agreement is a most welcome one. However, in the text not a word is being said about the violation of human rights and instead of using “climate change refugees” or “displaced persons”, “climate change induced displacement” is used which weakens the human dimension of the policy-issue. “Enhance understanding, coordination and cooperation” can thus possibly be seen as rules of qualification and eligibility in order for resource-poor, climate change affected countries to receive help of the rich, unaffected countries. Again it *is* important to think first before taking rash action, and country’s institutional problems *can* be a predicament for anyone trying to make a change there, but it is crucial to remain aware of the possibility of prejudice in the use of frames and labels by policy-relevant actors. Especially in the case of climate change refugees where there is a structural imbalance between the requests of those able to offer help and those who have to meet the demands to gain help.

In a way then, the emphasis on international legislation and knowledge accumulation as solution to the problem of climate change refugees is also a particular framework which precludes people from looking for different, context-specific solutions. This is interrelated with the third conclusion: the responsibility for action can be said to be context-specific. An issue that has been

elaborately discussed is whether climate change refugees should be included in the Geneva Convention or whether their situation is so extraordinary that they should acquire their own law. This is interrelated with the question whether the international community bears responsibility or not. What I was able to conclude from my findings was that emphasizing the exclusive, disadvantaged situation of climate change refugees does not necessarily need to go hand in hand with a claim for a separate, international legislative framework. Both policy-relevant actors at a national level as well as actors on a local level in Bangladesh acknowledged that the issue should become a higher priority on the Government's agenda for progression to be made. The responsibility for action is thus located at the national level and not at the international level. However, again it can be argued that there is an unequal balance here. Organizations in the more remote areas of Bangladesh were definitely not ignorant as to what was happening around them but there did seem to be a lack of communication with Dhaka. It might be very well possible then that the Government is their ultimate point of reference: solutions in the line of international lobbying are beyond their frame of reference. Indeed, the emphasis on self-reliance and the lack of clear categorization of climate refugees seemed to implicate so. The international organizations both sought to include climate change refugees in existing programs and legislation on development and migration. Although the latter might offer some perspective, for climate refugees to be included in periodic development programs could reflect a reluctance to engage in more structural solutions and thus long-lasting responsibility. Awareness of the existence of other frameworks is thus an important tool to effectively choose your position and find ways to address opponents. You could argue then, that the knowledge gap between the remote, disaster-prone areas and the lobbyists in Dhaka, extends to include the international lobby as well.

The abovementioned findings lead to the fourth conclusion: solutions for climate change refugees are very context-specific. This poses constraints and offers opportunities for adaptation measures to be included in an international framework of action. In Bangladesh, with overpopulation and a scarcity of land, land is a valuable asset to have and a terrible loss to suffer. A lot of the climate change impacts in Bangladesh are related to water (floods, cyclones, sea-level rise) and after these events the water tends to remain in the place it flooded. Some of the labeling and most of the policy activities of organizations sympathetic to the cause of climate change refugees are therefore related to regaining of land, safe housing, access to safe drinking water, and so on. Although it is possible to explain why these measures are significant in the Bangladesh context, to do so for every country in need of adaptation measures is a time-consuming business and will possibly result in many different programs, different budgets and different calculations as to who should compensate for what and why. This makes it hard for those accountable to see whether measures are actually helping or why it is them who should help at all in the first place. The context specific measures that are needed then, leave the plight for adaptation and compensation open to discussion on each of these aspects. On the

other hand, the same context-specific solutions could diminish the anxiety of Western countries to be ‘flooded’ by climate refugees. This might make them more willing to contribute to additional, development-like measures to help climate refugees within the country of origin. So even though the case for global interdependency is harder to make when it comes to adaptation measures, the context-specific solutions with regard to climate change refugees offer some perspective for change.

All in all, it is important to remain aware of the fact that men define the same situation differently in a way that is beneficial for them, resulting in different realities. Reality then, should never be taken as a given but should always be looked at critically to see whether the principles of frameworks are reasonable or prejudiced. Thus, to answer to the main question - *How are climate change refugees labeled and framed by policy-relevant, interpretive communities in Bangladesh, and how does this relate to the international problem perception?*- a cautious stance is necessary. Even though knowledge acquisition about climate change refugees is necessary to take action as claimed by interpretive community 1, the Dhaka-based international organizations, it is also necessary to critically look at the kind of knowledge that is requested, how much ‘more’ of it is needed and who is making these requests. In the same regard, even though the label climate change refugee is used at a local level in Bangladesh by interpretive community 2, the (non-governmental) organizations in remote, disaster prone areas, it is necessary to ensure this label is not being used merely as a tool to gain funding as climate change has become booming business. A critical attitude is thus necessary to gain insight into why a policy-issue is dealt with the way it is, to be able to reconcile opposing frameworks or effectively fight opponents’ view on reality. However, as the comparison with the international debate has shown, being critical in itself requires knowledge of the existing different realities, knowledge which not everyone is able to afford, or access, or even aware of. So yet again the idiom “knowledge is power” applies, and therefore the inequality between rich, unaffected countries and poor, affected countries regarding climate change management should be observed carefully to make sure human beings will not suffer the consequences of a political contest between differing frameworks.

Recommendations

As this was a small scale, exploratory research I would suggest a quantitative large scale research to be able to say with more certainty whether or not interpretive communities exist and what their differences and similarities are. In this respect a latent class analysis (LCA) would be very useful. LCA is a statistical method aimed at finding subtypes of related classes – latent classes- within the interrelatedness of survey-themes, the provided responses and certain response patterns (Uebersax, 2007). Latent classes are defined by the criterion of “conditional interdependence” which means that within each latent class, each variable is statistically independent of every other variable (ibid.). To illustrate: a doctor might ask a patient three independent questions about symptoms of a disease (present or absent), and from the response to each of these three questions he can tell whether the

patient belongs to the latent class “sick” or to the latent class “healthy” (Uebersax, 2007; Vermunt and Magidson, 2003). So if a large scale survey on the policy-issue of climate change refugees would be conducted, attitudes related to labeling, solutions and responsibility could be analyzed and the answers of policy-relevant actors might reveal a latent class or in this case, the presence or absence of a particular framework. Also, it would be possible to assign cases (INGOs, climate change refugees) to their most likely latent class (knowledge first, action now) (Uebersax, 2007). The results would contribute to the ‘tangibility’ of the still vague concept of climate change refugees and could help to increase awareness among policy-relevant actors that there are multiple perspectives to the same problem and increase mutual understanding. This, I believe, is quite necessary to increase coordination among actors and accumulate and coordinate the knowledge they possess.

Another recommendation would be to raise awareness about how adaptation measures too, will contribute to the common wealth of all countries not just the ones facing climate change, in order to stimulate a pro-active attitude. Countries affected by climate change as of now are dependent on the mutual moral responsibility of societies for the creation of a global framework of adaptation. As this research has shown though, this moral responsibility can be evaded using excuses which results in an uneven balance between developed and developing countries. Two things are necessary to do in this respect: First, to keep trying to make an appeal to the mutual moral responsibility of societies through an appeal for the defense of human rights of climate change refugees, as human rights are embraced by developed countries as well. Second, to try and show how the benefits of strong, early action on climate change considerably outweigh the costs (Stern 2006, p.2). Even though the interrelatedness of countries’ welfare is more clear with mitigation, the same yields for timely adaptation measures: years and years of pro-longed relief aid and development programs which are not specifically targeted at climate refugees will be less effective and more costly than structural hands-on solutions that might even prevent them from migrating at all. This beneficial interrelatedness should receive more attention: as the argument is an efficient one and not a moral one it might be more efficient in stimulating knowledge accumulation and concerted efforts to diminish the impact of climate change on human lives. One practical way to achieve this, would be to ensure that countries facing climate change threats should be provided (if needed) with the necessary funding, technical know-how etc. to develop a sound National Adaptation Plan for Action. As another conclusion of this research yields that solutions to climate change displacement are context-specific, the NAPA will illustrate the humanitarian impact of climate change as well as the costs that come with not taking action. Together the NAPA’s would provide a pool of knowledge which would fulfill the request of the international community and take away a possible excuse for non-action. Moreover, solutions will likely be context-specific with can take away fears of international refugee flows and contribute to a more pro-

active attitude. Finally, an in-depth understanding of climate change induced displacement will contribute to awareness as to how to target this group for donor-programs.

Discussion: limitations and strengths

A lot of academic debate has been focused on the question whether climate refugees should be included in international legislative frameworks. I think this research has shown how useful it can be to look at how a policy-issue is framed and labeled instead of looking at the people whom the policy is targeted at. Discovering inequalities and power in frameworks is useful to effectively target problems relating to the policy-response and/or the lack thereof. If the humanitarian community could make a case for the human rights violations of climate change refugees for example, it would no longer be reasonable for UNHCR and IOM to merely plea for a change of mind at the government level, as they themselves adhere to a human rights approach. In this respect, this subject in particular lends itself well for a labeling and framing analysis and it has not been looked at from this perspective before. A second strength of my research is how I have taken into consideration the treatment of the policy-issue on the local level, on the national level and on the international level, instead of focusing on just one. These research findings therefore provide a truly unique insight into the political dynamics around the policy-issue and on the state of the policy-response as it is now. On the international level there still is only awareness, while on the local level there is acknowledgement and action: a significant discrepancy which would have been missed conducting merely a local case study or an analysis of the international debate. Moreover, country-specific case studies are rare, and this research provides a contribution in that respect as well. Third, instead of treating climate change refugees as a concept in need of defining to fit an international framework, this research shows that climate change refugees as of now are actually being assisted by organizations who are concerned with them, and who have implemented actual solutions to help them. As the concept of climate change refugees is still very vague, I believe this research has contributed to the tangibility of the policy-issue.

There are also some limitations to my research. First, I conducted my research while being employed as a research assistant at Unnayan Onneshan. This provided me with a great number of opportunities and a couple of constraints. While working there I selected a number of organizations myself, and was provided with many contacts of policy-relevant organizations by my UO supervisor. Almost all of the organizations my supervisor and I selected were involved in development aid for the disadvantaged population and therefore possibly targeted at climate change refugees. This however proved not always the case as with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) which was actually primarily targeted at nature conservation. Second, as my stay in Bangladesh lasted only a month I had little time to reflect upon my findings and act accordingly. For example, it was only after I got home that I realized that I had wanted to analyze the Water Development Board, the principal agency of the government for managing Bangladesh' water resources, as so many climate change

impacts in Bangladesh are related to water and the WDB is a key player in policy-response. Due to my short duration of stay then, I have been unable to use all the opportunities to improve my research. Third, even though I was able to interview a parliamentarian in the Environment Department, I felt I was not able to gain a proper understanding of the government's policy-response as a number of different ministries is involved and it was very hard to gain access to more than just one government official. As responsibility often was located at the government, it is a limitation that I was not able to gain a proper counter-argument to the views expressed by others. Finally, climate change is an extremely broad, complicated topic within which numerous policy-relevant actors are involved. The abovementioned limitations indicate that for me it was rather impossible to gain a comprehensive understanding of the policy-landscape in Bangladesh. Even though I tried my best to draw my conclusions with "passionate humility", the analysis remains interpretive and more extensive research by some-one else might offer a different view of climate change refugees' reality, unsurprisingly.

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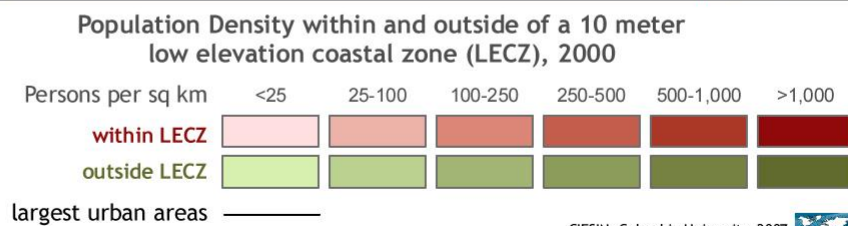
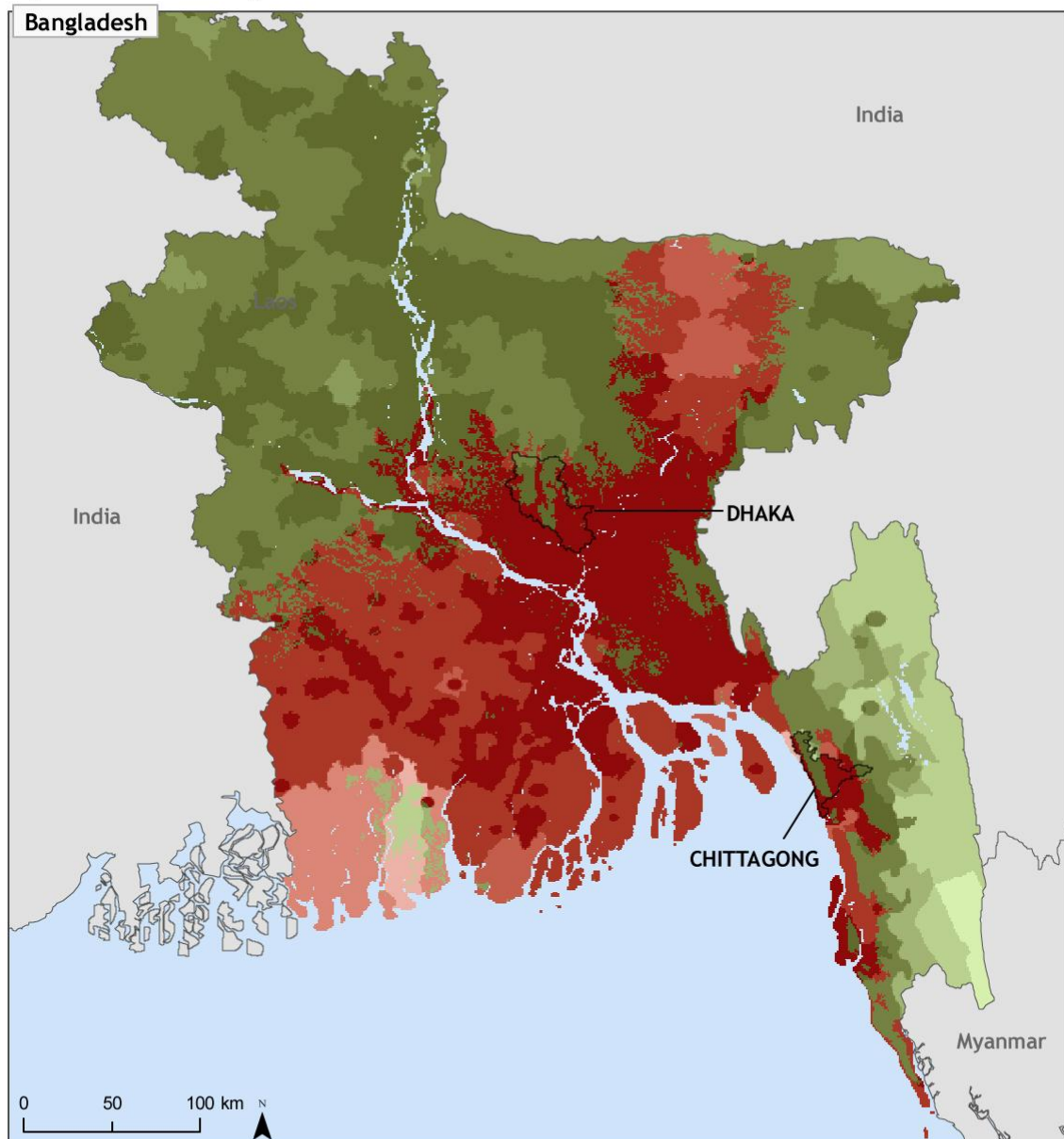
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Annex 1: Population density in Bangladesh

CIESIN Columbia University. 2007. *Population density within and outside of a 10m low elevation coastal zone*. Creative Commons 2.5 [online] Available through: <http://www.seos-project.eu/modules/world-of-images/images/Bangladesh_10m_LECZ_and_population_density.jpg> [Accessed 23 December 2011].

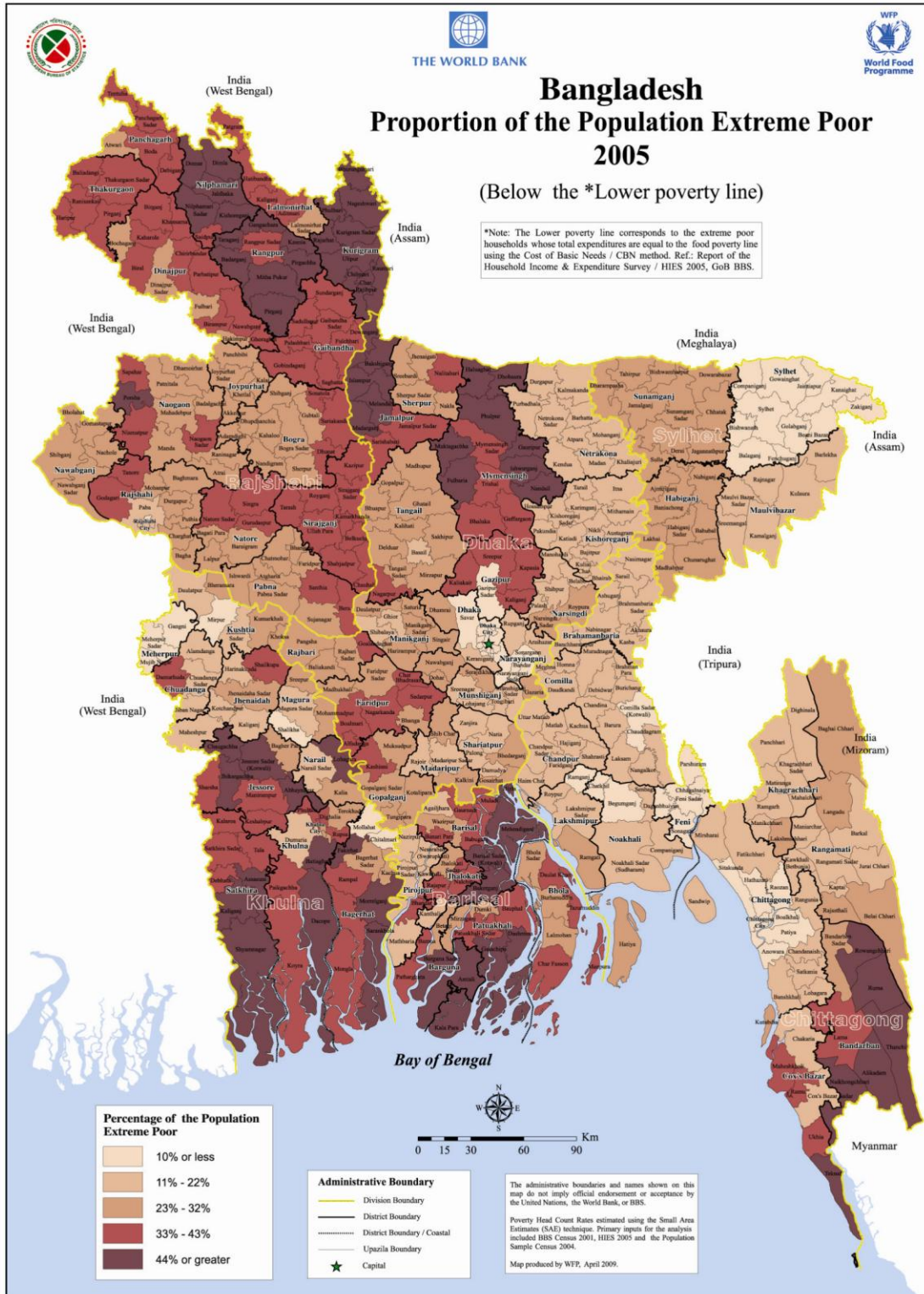
Population Density within and outside of a 10m Low Elevation Coastal Zone



CIESIN, Columbia University, 2007
<http://sedac.ciesin.columbia.edu/gpw/lecz.jsp>

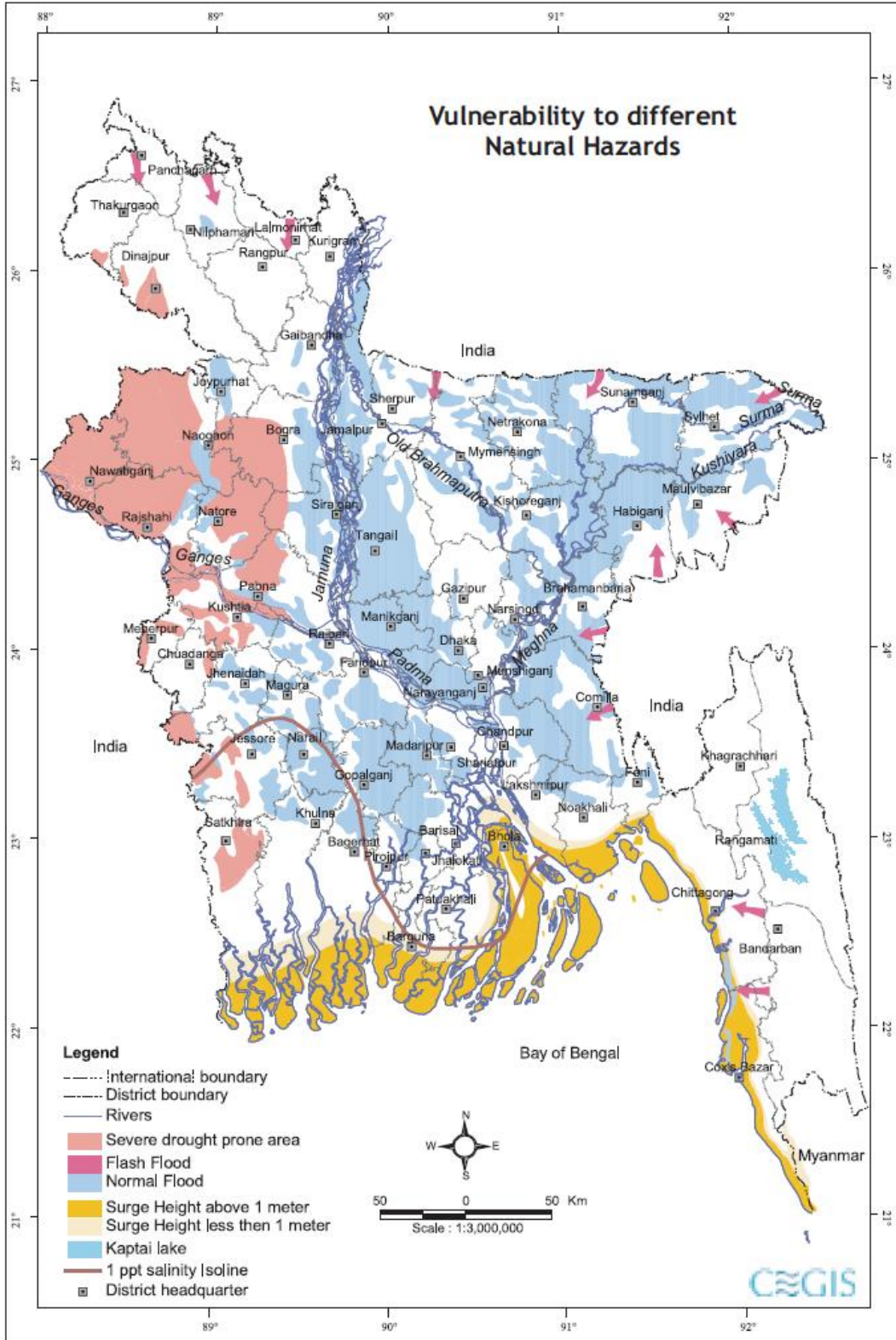
Annex 2: Proportion of the extreme poor of Bangladesh' population

World Food Programme. 2009. *Bangladesh proportion of population extreme poor 2005*. Food security atlas [online] Available through <http://www.foodsecurityatlas.org/bgd/country/food-security-at-a-glance/fs-at-a-glance-file/Poverty-Map_Bangladesh_Lower-A3_Re-saved100.JPG> [Accessed 23 December 2011].



Annex 3: Bangladesh' vulnerability to different natural hazards

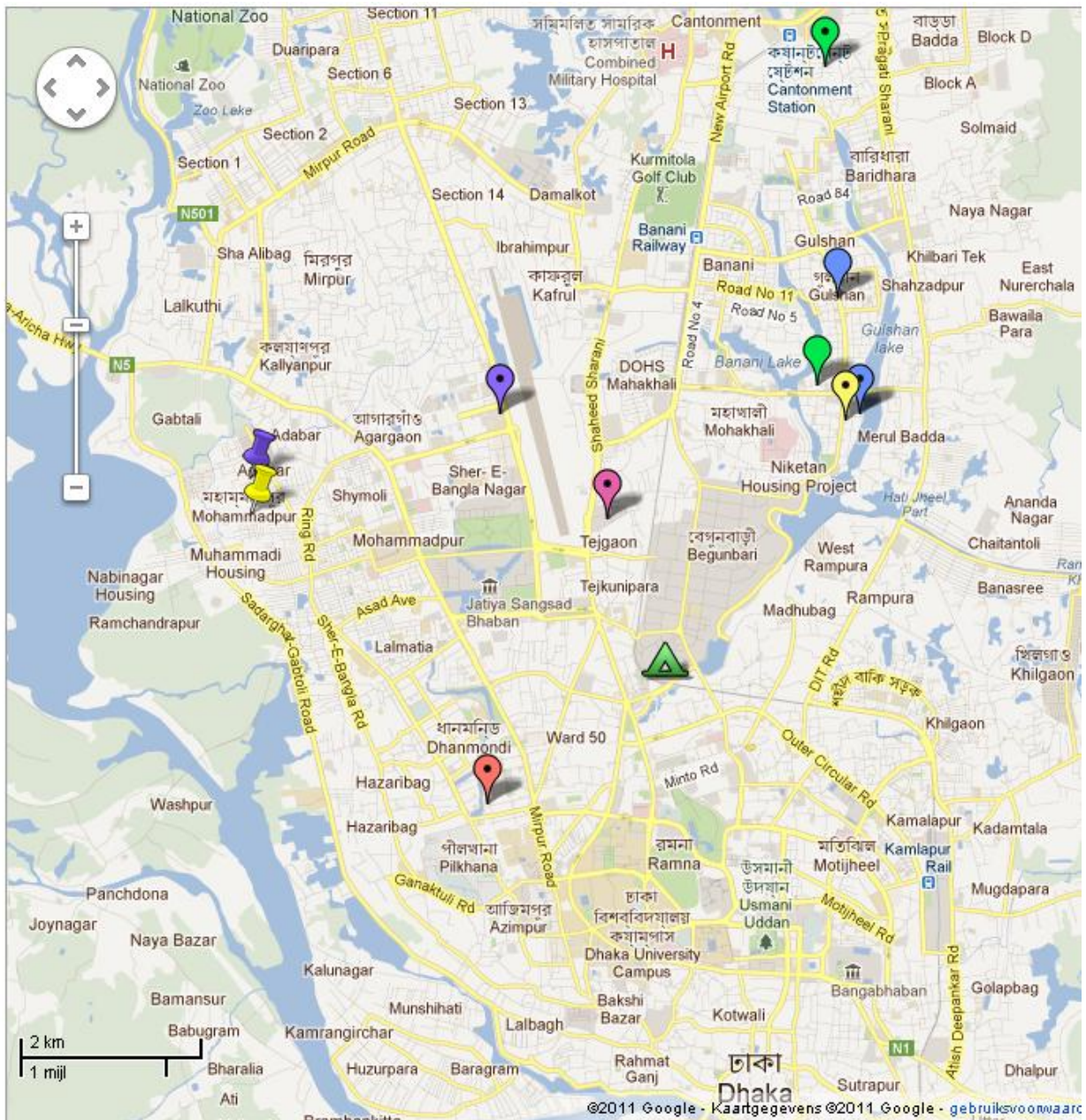
Centre for Environmental and Geographic Information Services (CEGIS). N.d. *Vulnerability to different natural hazards*. Bangladesh Climate Change and Strategy Action Plan 2009, p.6., 1: 3.000 000, Dhaka: CEGIS.



Annex 4: Location of analyzed policy-relevant actors in Dhaka, Bangladesh

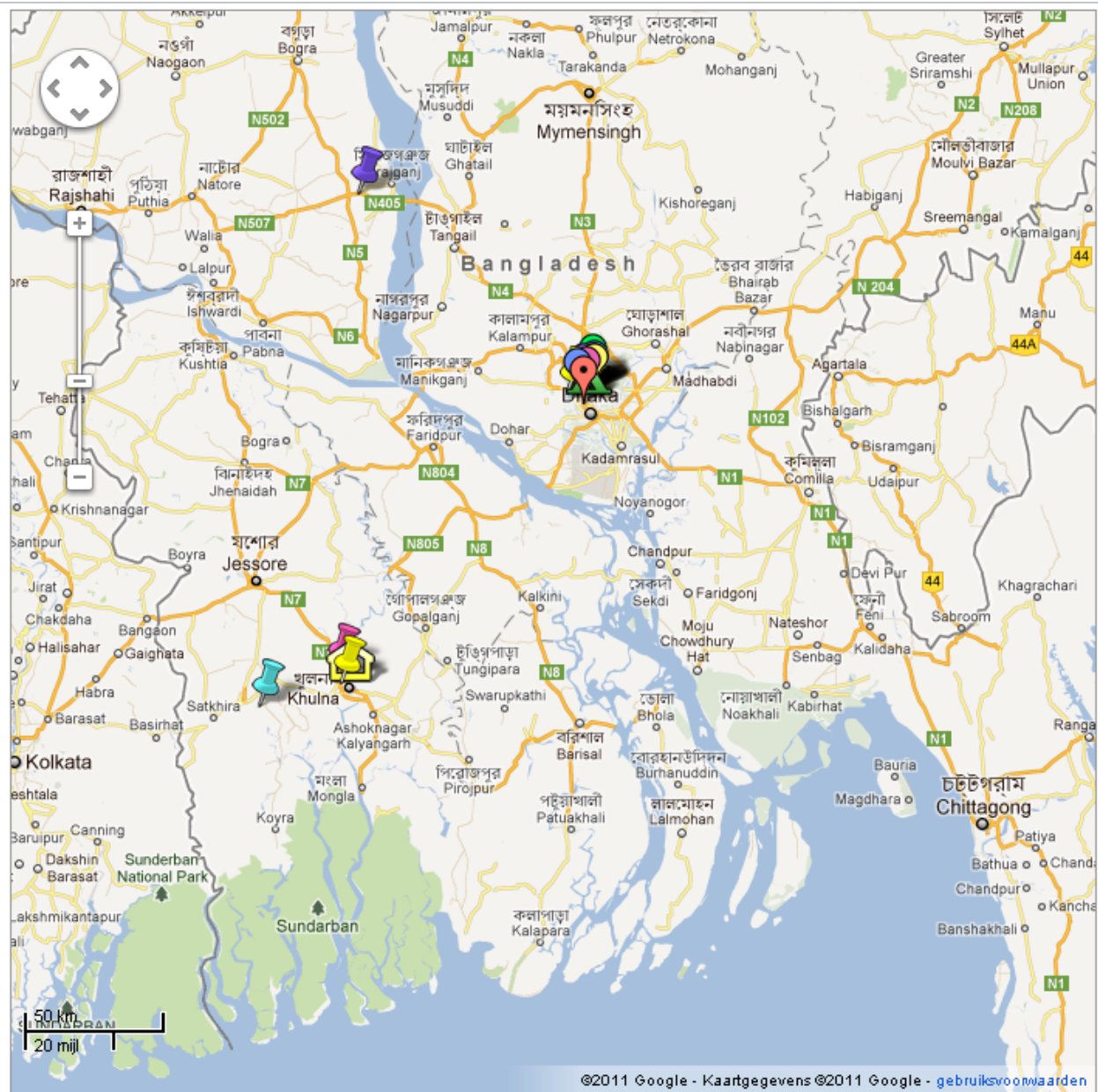
Google Maps 2011. *Organizations involved in climate change policy making.* Available through:

<<http://maps.google.nl/maps/ms?msid=216886332131018386184.0004a8f603d1cf2f15a2b&msa=0>> [Accessed 22 December 2011]. (legend on page 86)

















Annex 5: Location of analyzed policy-relevant actors in Bangladesh

Google Maps 2011. *Organizations involved in climate change policy making.* Available through: <http://maps.google.nl/maps/ms?msid=216886332131018386184.0004a8f603d1cf2f15a2b&sa=0> [Accessed 22 December 2011]. (legend on page 86)



Legend: analyzed policy-relevant actors in Bangladesh

-  Prime Minister Office
Office of Prime Minister Sjeikh Hasina
-  IOM
The International Organisation for Migration promotes the humane and orderly policies in the movement of persons across borders.
-  UNDP
The United Nations Development Programme is the UN's global development network, an organization advocating for change and connecting countries to knowledge, experience and resources to assist people build a better life.
-  Practical Action
Practical Action works alongside communities to find practical solutions to the poverty they face. They perceive technology as a vital contributor to people's livelihoods.
-  IUCN
The International Union for Conservation of Nature, helps the world find pragmatic solutions to our most pressing environment and development challenges
-  Concern Worldwide
International humanitarian organization dedicated to tackling poverty and suffering in the world's poorest countries
-  Karwan Bazar, Dhaka
Interviews with 5 slum dwellers, living next to railway track, who migrated amongst others due to riverbank erosion
-  BCAS
Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies, independent, non-governmental, research and policy institute with the aim of providing guidance and practical solutions to promote sustainable development, eradicate poverty, improve access of the poor to resources and ensure social justice
-  DFID
Department For International Development of the UK government, responsible for promoting development and reduction of poverty. One of the major donors for Bangladesh climate change programs.
-  GKS (head and liaison office)
Gono Kalyan Sangstha is committed to ensure basic needs, i.e. foods, clothes, education, health, shelter and recreational facilities for the hardcore poor people
-  Shushilan (head and liaison office)
Shushilan came into being in the face of degradation of socio-ecological resources in the southwest coastal region with specific mission to create opportunities for the economic and socio-cultural development of the socially underprivileged community
-  ACR
Association for Climate Refugees' chief mission is to protect climate displaced people and find durable, sustainable residential solutions for people who have already been displaced by climate change
-  SUS
Satkhira Unnayan Sangstha chief mission is to work together with the people, especially the hardcore poor and women, to help them become aware of the values, dignity and rights of each and every individual and help them take action to improve their socio-economic development
-  Ambita Bazar and Daulatpur Bazar, Khulna
Interviews with 6 families living next to railway-track and at farmland on short distance from Khulna

Annex 6: List of interviews with policy-relevant actors (transcripts in separate booklet)

ID	Contact	Affiliation	Position	Date of interview
IO #1	Highly placed official	UNDP	-	18 July 2011
IO #2	Anita J. Wadud	IOM	Project development and program coordinator	18 July 2011
INGO #1	Haseeb Irfanullah	Practical Action	Team leader reducing vulnerability and NRM	19 July 2011
NGO #1	Mr. Mostafa Nuruzzaman	Sushillan	Director	20 July 2011
INGO #2	High official	IUCN	-	21 July 2011
INGO #3	Mr. Saroj Dash	-	Technical Program Coordinator Climate Change	24 July 2011
CCR #1 -4	Inhabitants of Karwan Bazar Dhaka	Climate change refugees	-	25 July 2011
Donor #1	Official adviser	DFID	Climate Change and Environment	25 July 2011
NGO #2	Research fellow	BCAS	Research fellow	30 July 2011

NGO #3	Mr. Musa	ACR	Director, founder	2 August 2011
CCR #5-9	Inhabitants of Daulatpur Bazar and Ambita Bazar Khulna city	Climate change refugees	-	2 August 2011
NGO #4	Joy, Paritoss, Adito	Amvita Adarsha Club		2 August 2011
NGO #5	Sk. Eman Ali	Satkhira Unnayan Sangsta	Director	3 August 2011
Gov #1	Member of Parliament	Ministry of Forest and Environment	Member of Parliament	5 August 2011
NGO #6	Mohon Kunan Montal	LEDARS	Executive director	July 2011
NGO #7	Ms. Saima Yesmin	Gono Kalyan Sangstha	Executive director	July 2011
NGO #8	Khalid Pashe, Joy	Initiative for Right View	Coordinator (CEO)	July 2011