

A special category

Refugees and Asylum-Seekers

To comprehend this fact it helps to understand first that refugees — estimated in 1991 to total about 17 million, 87 per cent of them in developing countries — make up only a portion of the world's stream of migrants. Although the word "refugee" has come to suggest any migrant forced to leave home, the international community recognizes as refugees only those migrants who live outside their home country out of fear of political persecution if they return.

Regional agreements in Africa and the Americas have broadened the term to recognize claims of "being in a refugee-like situation" by those forced to move for economic or environmental reasons. The international agreement covering refugees has changed little, however, since 1951.

As the margins of survival shrink it may be impossible to assign a single cause to the movement of people. Migration

them are already in place and need to be strengthened. These strategies are rooted in the concept of burden-sharing by the wealthier nations and consist of a series of components.

• Support for countries of first asylum. Often this requires attention of the development needs of the countries that are hosting the refugees, who otherwise can end up competing with impoverished local populations for scarce land and other resources, risking an expansion of violence.

• Securing conditions that will allow voluntary repatriation. This, of course, requires the resolution of the conflict that spurred the movement of refugees in the first place. Despite the seeming impossibility of the task, many refugees have returned to former conflict zones in Central America, southern Africa, Indo-China and Sri Lanka. These regions will require



Most refugees go from one developing country to another. These Kurdish refugees were escaping war.

is driven by economics, degraded environments, politics, conflict or combinations of any or all these factors.

What is clear is that the scale of refugee movement is growing rapidly, despite the end of the Cold War. The US Committee for Refugees estimated in 1992 that 16.65 million refugees required assistance and protection. The figure includes those seeking but

long-term development assistance, however.

• Monitoring of international migration, to allow nations to know what they face in admitting refugees. Nations should also consider the concept of providing temporary sanctuary for refugees to permanent residence; in combination with efforts at successful repatriation.

Refugees, notes The State



In time of war or civil crisis women bear the burden of keeping the family together. Up to 75 per cent of refugees are women. This Ethiopian family is being bussed to safety in Kenya.

not yet granted asylum as refugees, most of them in Europe and North America. An additional 3.5 million or 4 million more people, by conservative estimates, are in "refugee-like situations." An estimated 23 million people have been forced to move within their countries but have not crossed an international border.

Strategies to deal with

of World Population, 1993, "provide the bitter human evidence that social and economic tensions overflow national boundaries." Over the long-term, international assistance will need to aim not only at the resolution of political conflicts but the development of sustainable livelihoods in the countries refugees now flee.

—UNFPA

MIGRATION

Special On

The theme of this year's State of World Population Report from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), expected to be published today, 6th July is migration. Migration is increasingly attracting global attention, but lacks sufficient information and reliable data about its causes and consequences. The Report is an attempt to examine the pattern of both internal and international migration and its implications for development.

People are moving from rural areas to cities on an unprecedented scale, especially in developing countries. There are over 100 million international migrants: in fact, international migration among developing countries is much larger than from South to North.

Urban growth has been and sometimes still is the sign of development. Nations have been built on the

shoulders of migrant workers, and there is still a strong demand for migrant labour. In world trade, remittances from migrants are second in value only to oil and larger than total overseas development assistance. And there are the "invisible migrants," women, who make up half of all migrant flows, but are routinely ignored in statistics and discussion of migration.

The Report suggests that "reduction of population pressures will limit the potential for migratory movement and enhance progress towards a sustainable future in the developing world." For this purpose, balanced development including health and education especially for women and girls; family planning is most critical, says the report.

Given the importance of the issue, The Daily Star today brings out special feature on 'Migration'.



Inequity, Population Boom Fuel Movement of People

"SUCCESSFUL national development policies respond directly to the needs of individuals, wherever they are," concludes The State of World Population, 1993. "Providing reproductive health and family planning services, especially for women and the rural poor, will promote economic development and help reduce the need to migrate."

Migration has historically produced social and economic benefits for all concerned, the UN agency reports. Even today, annual remittances from international migrants to their families at home amount to \$66 billion, second in its value to the global economy only to oil and larger than all foreign development assistance from governments.

Yet the movement of millions of people annually now strains both industrialized and developing countries, the reports concludes. Some "megacities," magnets for migrants from rural areas and small towns, could double in size in a dozen years. Yet services to urban dwellers are declining and rural populations continue to grow, raising doubts about the cities' capacity for absorbing those who want to move there in the future.

With an estimated 100 million international migrants worldwide, the proportion of people living outside their country of birth approaches 2 per cent of the world's population. Of this number, perhaps 17 million are refugees and another 20 million have fled violence, drought and environmental destruction, according to the State of World Population report, subtitled The Individual and the World: Population, Migration and Development in the 1990s. No one knows how many people are "internally displaced" within their own countries by the same forces.

Critical to current and future growth in migration is the growth of world population, which will add a record-breaking 98 million people per year this decade, the vast majority of them in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

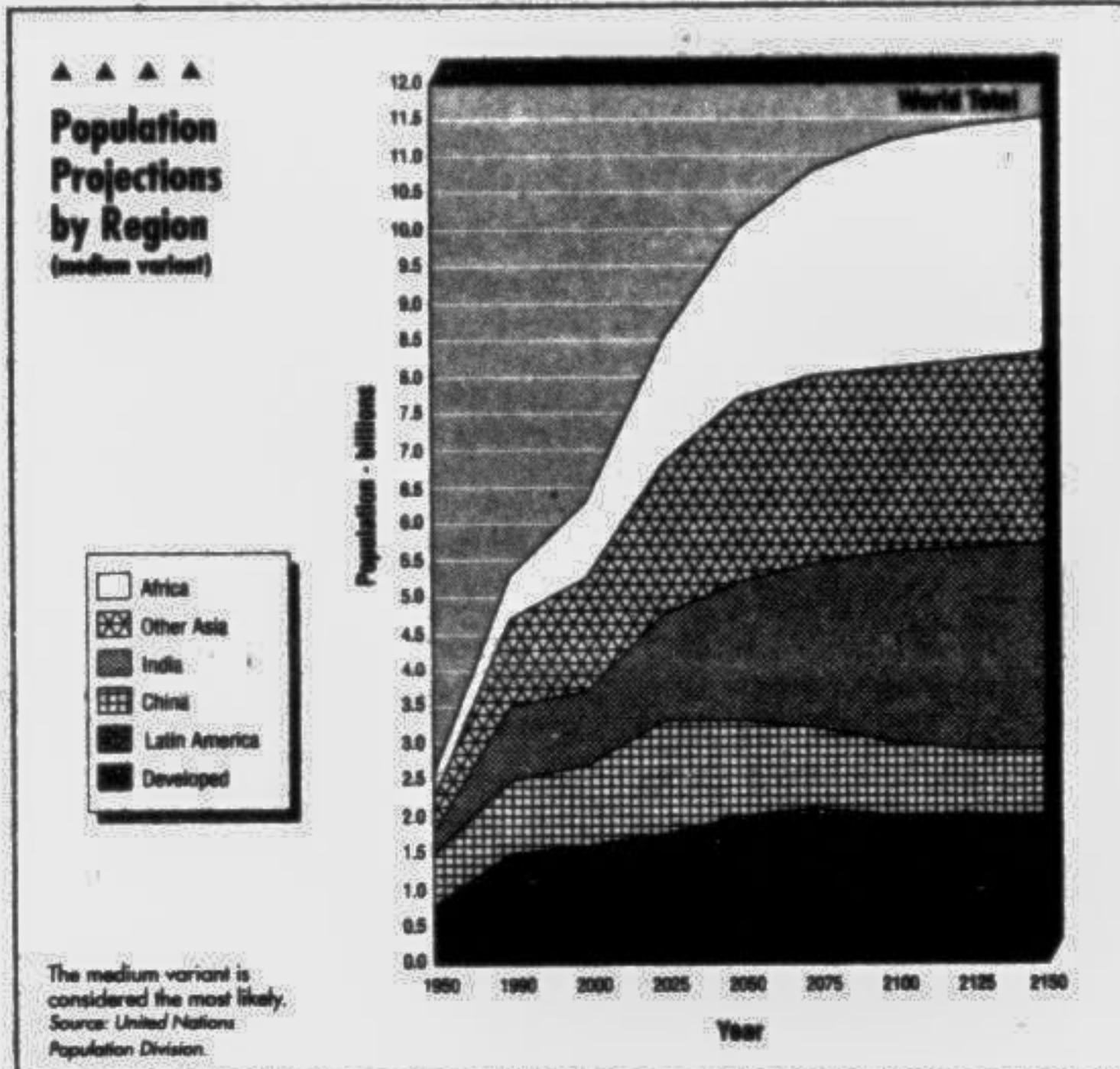
"The only effective means to reduce migration pressure over the long term are to slow population growth; to stimulate economic growth and job creation at home, and promote the development of the individual and the family as the ba-

sic economic and social unit," the report states. Otherwise, it suggests, migration "could become the human crisis of our age."

Investments in improving the status of women and such services as education and health, including family planning, "help contribute to lower fertility, to economic growth and social balance," states the report. "They help to create an atmosphere in which migra-

cities. "As the pressures encouraging migration increase, the options for migrants become more limited," the report notes. These conflicting forces are "contributing to the atmosphere of crisis surrounding both urban and international migration."

Once, migration was "circular," with many migrants returning home from the city or abroad. But this kind of



temporary migration is becoming less common.

Overwhelmingly, the biggest movement of people is from the countryside to the city, usually without crossing any national borders. A major reason cities have become so attractive is that rural population growth "exceeds the capacity of the agrarian sector to support it." But this is only one cause of migration. Most development has been concentrated in and around cities, to the disadvantage of rural areas. Wage differences in the two areas are widening and social services are more likely to be found in large cities. Lack of land tenure in agricultural zones means that once the soil is exhausted, there's no reason for farmers to stay with it.

Despite the poverty evident in so many developing world cities, extensive surveys have shown most urban migrants are pleased with their move. Urban advantages are real, despite the lack of good jobs and housing that greet new migrants. Many report they pre-

ferred poverty in the city to deprivation and desperation in the countryside.

In detailing the magnitude of the movement of people and the forces that underlie it, the UNFPA report paints a daunting picture of the scale of the problem the world needs to prepare for still more increases in the number of migrants, which already exceeds any seen before in history.

Continuing rapid population growth in many parts of the developing world, the report notes, "high levels of natural increase in cities as well as continuing rural-urban migration; the addition of unprecedented numbers of young people, many with some education, to the urban labour force; continuous contact with the values and lifestyles of more affluent countries, coupled with a general rise in expectations, indicate the likelihood of more rather than less international migration in the future."

Yet it is equally clear that both industrialized and developing countries can do much to create conditions that would help ease migratory pressures, especially over the long term.

To begin with, nations need to consider urbanization, international migration and the search for asylum not as separate problems but as different expressions of changing social, economic and political circumstances at the national and global level. Dominating the movement of people are disparities in opportunities, social and economic conditions between the sending and receiving areas. Uncertainty in these movements is exacerbated by unpredictable short and long-term crises that often bring locally but soon have international impacts.

Often, in fact, parents encourage the migration of daughters as part of a family survival strategy. The evidence strongly suggests that, in combination with poverty, high fertility itself is a spur for female migration. Studies in Asia

may be suspended so that factories that depend on migrant labour may fire any woman who becomes pregnant. The poor health and precarious lives of migrant women "can easily push the strain of pregnancy and childbirth to the crisis point."

The report calls for new development and migration policies aimed at broadening options for women who are real or potential migrants, including the expansion of family planning and other health services and improved access to economic resources such as land ownership. Women already make their own decisions to move. Now they need the power to make other critical decisions about their lives.

Low Paid and Largely Invisible

THE historic image of the migrant is that of a young man, meagre possession in hand. Perhaps he is alone. Perhaps he is lending his family to a new life in the big city or a foreign land. Yet nearly half the migrants who cross international borders are women, according to The State of World Population, 1993 from the United Nations Population Fund. In western Europe, most people who were born in a foreign country are female. In Latin America, the most urban of the developing-world regions, most people migrating from the countryside to cities are women. Some countries regularly witness mass movements of women to do seasonal work in export industries. Moreover, women constitute up to 75 per cent of refugee populations, frequently the only support of their children and elderly family members.

Until recently, however, migrating women were little noticed and rarely studied. Immigration policies remain biased toward men, limiting women's access to support services and making naturalization dependent on that of a spouse. Research is beginning, however, to bring women out of the shadows of migration — and studies find that they move not so much to follow husbands or partners but, like men, to find work.

Female migrants are typically very young — many women make their first move as teenagers — or relatively old. Migration among women actually peaks in the late fifties and sixties, as divorce, separation or widowhood forces a search for new opportunities. Except in Africa, the report notes, "most women who migrate on their own are not

and Latin America have found that women who migrate typically come from larger than average families, an imbalance that is even more pronounced among families that have no land rights.

Yet the low status of women follows them to their destinations. Their lack of education compared to men limits their opportunities, and they most often find themselves holding marginal jobs — often reserved for women in the migrant community — that are characterized by low wages and little security. Employers tend to see migrant women as inexpensive, docile and expendable.

As a result of such conditions, women who migrate — whether to their own capital cities or to other countries — often become prisoners of their low status both as migrants and as women.

Even more importantly, women — especially refugee women — are vulnerable to rape and other forms of sexual exploitation and violence. Reports of the mistreatment and sexual abuse of domestic workers led some sending countries in the 1980s to restrict the issuance of overseas work permits. Yet there has been little international intervention to protect women, and none to speak of to discourage illegal traffic in women or the prostitution that is exploding in many developing world cities.

Nor do female migrants and refugees tend to have access to even the most minimal reproductive health services. Undesired pregnancies, a problem for women even surrounded by traditional support networks, can become disasters for women who must work to survive. Labour laws



Migrant women are assumed to be dependents — but most can do work, though they may be over qualified for the work they find.

married." The city offers a special draw to rural women who lack opportunities for earning an income in the communities of their birth. In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, "women produce up to 80 per cent of food grown for local consumption, [yet] only 8 per cent hold title to the land they work." The need for income becomes especially acute for women left at home after husbands, brothers and fathers have migrated, or who are widowed by AIDS.

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THE way huge metropolises of millions of people have mushroomed in the four corners of the earth in the second half of this century is startling. Nothing, it seems, can stop the breakneck expansion of the cities in general and the Third World in particular record an expansion of 3.6 per cent per annum. During the 30 years (1950-1980), the urban population of the world increased from 300 million to 1.8 billion and the figure is expected to exceed the rural population for the first time towards the end of the century.

Some cities have exploded. Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, has experienced a rapid growth of population since the late 1960's. According to the United Nations 1984 assessment, Dhaka was the 31st largest city in the world in 1985 and by the year 2000, is expected to be the 15th largest, when the total population of the city will be about 10 million.

Pollution, crime, traffic jams mark the life in a megapolis. Yet people from the rural areas still find them irresistibly attractive. What is

the magic? The untold story is that these cities are hives of industry which have the opportunity to create far more wealth than the rural areas ever do, subsequently to gain share of all the educational, health, training and cultural facilities.

In classical economic pattern, urban growth or rush in urban migration is related to the availability of rural surplus, whereas in many developing countries like Bangladesh, India, cities are growing in a process of rural population seeking employment opportunities. Results from various studies and the 1981 census report suggest that at least half of the total increase of urban population since 1961 was caused by rural-urban migration.

Bangladesh experienced colonial exploitation for over two hundred years, first by the British, followed by what was then West Pakistan, causing substantial impoverishment to the rural sector.

Development during the period of her partnership with erstwhile Pakistan was financed primarily through "squeezing the peasants" and even after independence, ur-

Accumulating Urban Crisis

by Rashed Mahmud Titumir

ban bias development strategy was quite obvious. Rural Bangladesh, again, is characterised by a high degree of inequality in the distribution

urban exodus and the size of the urban population, especially after the independence

growing landlessness, exploitation by the rural elite and money lenders, natural disasters (mostly riverbank erosion), exploding under-em-

ployment, overpopulation. Urban poverty in Bangladesh is, nothing but a spill-over of rural poverty.



The pain of hunger pushed away destiny.

of income and assets. Differences in access to resource condition the growth potential of social classes. The rapid increase in both

of Bangladesh, was stimulated by expansion of trade, commerce, manufacturing and administration to serve the newly emerged Bengali bour-



Is it the magic of megapolis?

face of deteriorating rural conditions. Studies at micro-level have identified a number of push factors in rural areas, including

On balance, according to

studies, it may not be unrealistic to assume that urban migration may continue at the annual rate of 1 per cent of the rural population. This means that the urban population will increase from about 27.2 million in 1989/90 to about 40.4 million by the year 2000, a rate of growth of 4 per cent per year.

In some of the large cities, such as Dhaka and Khulna, migrants accounted for almost three-quarters of the total increase in population during 1961-74 census period. Between 1974-1981, urban migration contributed 70.5 per cent of population growth of Dhaka city. Recently, the Centre for Urban Studies has pointed out that both rural-urban and urban-urban difference is the main reason and the real answer to central attraction of Dhaka city. The centre postulates that the disparity in resource allocation is visible not only between urban and rural areas, it is also visible among the urban centres. Big cities reap most of the development resources over the smaller ones and, therefore, they grow fast and faster than other small towns. The four metropolitan cities of the country contain

about half of the total urban population and resource concentrate in these cities at a disproportionately high rate. It is further evident that in the backdrop of limited accumulation of capital and generation of employment in the private sector, public sector employment plays a dominant role. The large metropolitan cities are the beneficiaries of this growth. For example, Dhaka alone enjoys 20 per cent of the total national public sector employment. On the other hand, 57 per cent of the total investment in physical planning and housing sector was spent in Dhaka city during 1977-80.

However, it is understandable that, faced with this welter of figures, the language employed to try and explain the new reality is not uncommon. We can also, for the moment, put the question, as to why it has taken so long to wake up to the problem. What is important to underline the urgency of tackling the issue here and now. Specifically, the question is whether we can make a practical job of tackling migration problem through striking a balance between the rural and urban development.