

Toward Great Dhaka: The value of planned urban expansion

ANTHONY VENABLES and JULIA BIRD

THE success of Dhaka as a productive, vibrant and resilient city is vital to Bangladesh's future. Home to 18 million people, Dhaka is the main hub of economic activity in the country, generating a fifth of national GDP and nearly half of all formal jobs. But with another 7 million residents expected by 2035, the issues that the city is already facing—congestion, flooding and messiness coming from poor access to services—need to be addressed urgently. How can the city respond to these challenges to put Dhaka on the path to a prosperous future?

One unique opportunity is the development of East Dhaka. This large tract of low-lying land is in a prime location, close to the current heart of the city. This is driving demand for the development of the area, but the current trend is toward haphazard developments. Land is acquired, and filled with sand, and there is little in the way of transport infrastructure or service provision. Before long, East Dhaka may look like the messy areas in the west of the city. But with good planning today, East Dhaka could become a modern hub of economic activity, with productive jobs and high-density modern housing that will create higher living standards for generations to come.

In a report just published by the World Bank, we analysed the opportunities of East Dhaka. Using modelling techniques at the forefront of economic research, we simulated four scenarios for the area, ranging from a business-as-usual approach to a full strategic scenario. The economic model captures the decisions of households, firms and land developers in Dhaka. Dhaka's residents want



PHOTO: STAR

productive, good-quality jobs, and to spend as little time as possible commuting to and from work on the city's roads. But they are constrained in their choices by their wages, rents and a congested transport network. Firms want to be accessible to their consumers, suppliers and workforce, and also to benefit from locating near other firms within the city. Together, these different groups interact, creating the city layout that we see today.

Under the business-as-usual scenario, the city continues to develop as now, with some transport investments completed and an ever-growing population. East Dhaka becomes increasingly developed using sand-filled land, although this is of low quality and subject to

earthquakes and flooding. The development is largely unplanned and haphazard and unlikely to deliver a modern, efficient city.

In the second scenario, an eastern embankment would be built along the Balu River. A vast amount of land would then become less vulnerable to flooding, thereby increasing the quality and amount of land available in East Dhaka for development. Some households and firms would move in, but there remains a risk that without planning and the provision of good public services, this will be messy, irregular residential developments like those seen in parts of West Dhaka today. Manufacturing firms will also be likely to move in; as the most land-intensive of economic sectors, they

will value the abundance of land. Under the third scenario, the benefits of the embankment are much larger if it is accompanied by the construction of more transport links, including two branches of mass rapid transit and one of bus rapid transit. This would encourage more households to move into the area, with good links to the rest of the city and beyond.

The fourth strategic scenario envisages extra policies designed to attract business service firms to relocate into a specific area of East Dhaka and the provision of extra amenities to make East Dhaka an attractive choice to live in. These policies are actually some of the hardest to implement, and may include a desirable tax environment and the removal of red tape to encourage firms. Firms often choose to cluster together, locating, for example, in the high-density Gulshan area despite the high rents. To create a new cluster of firms in East Dhaka, the business environment there has to be good enough for the firms to shift the economic centre of gravity of the city toward East Dhaka. The simulations suggest that the costs of doing business in East Dhaka should be reduced to 80–90 percent of the costs in Central Dhaka to encourage high-value-added firms to move into the area, generating productive jobs. Good amenities, including schools, health centres and protected green spaces, would encourage residents to move in, allowing households to live near their place of work and limiting the time spent commuting.

A strategic approach to the development of East Dhaka has the potential to make this area a vibrant hub of economic activity. Some 2.3 million jobs could locate in East Dhaka,

nearly a million of which are in the high-value-added business services sector. High-density housing could be home to over 6 million people, proving a good living environment. Importantly, some of these people would otherwise be living and working in Central Dhaka; the strategic approach would partially relieve the congestion and pressures on the rest of the city, creating a more balanced pattern of development.

The returns to such a project would be high. By 2035, the total output of Greater Dhaka is expected to reach USD 196 billion. While building the embankment alone could create an extra USD 20 billion in GDP, the full strategic approach could boost the city's GDP by a further USD 57 billion. Under the business-as-usual scenario, Greater Dhaka's income per capita is expected to reach USD 8,000 by 2035. Under the strategic scenario, this could increase to as much as USD 9,200. With East Dhaka as its engine of growth, this ambitious vision would move Dhaka up in the global ranking of cities, making it more prosperous than cities such as Lima, Peru and Xi'an, China.

The opportunities offered by East Dhaka are vast. With good planning and implementation, the area could lead Greater Dhaka into the future as a modern, productive city, providing jobs and homes for millions with a better quality of life, and generating revenue to sustain the city and propel the nation's growth as a whole.

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Turn down the rhetoric against migrants and refugees

CARL SÖDERBERGH

MIGRATION has become a focus of debate in recent years. From United States President Donald Trump's vehemently anti-migrant and anti-Muslim rhetoric to Denmark's new "ghetto laws", the language has become increasingly heated.

The Danish government adopted these measures in 2018, specifically targeting low-income immigrant districts and including compulsory education on "Danish values" for children starting at the age of one. In the United Kingdom, while still Home Secretary, Prime Minister Theresa May instituted a "hostile environment" policy in 2012 that was intended to catch undocumented migrants whenever they came into contact with public services.

The policy particularly affected members of the so-called "Windrush generation", the tens of thousands of Afro-Caribbean men, women and children who came over to the UK after World War Two and settled there legally. It is thought that the number of those deported runs into the hundreds, while many thousands more have had to live for several years in considerable uncertainty.

While a public outcry led to an official apology by the UK government, other leaders and governments have been resolutely unapologetic. Indeed, Trump's travel ban for citizens of several Muslim-majority countries was approved as constitutional by the US Supreme Court in June 2018.

Such policies—and the often-vitriolic language accompanying them—have had a direct and negative impact on migrant and refugee communities. According to data released by the Council on American-Islamic Relations, the annual number of hate crimes against US Muslims recorded by the organisation rose 15 percent in 2017, following on from a 44 percent increase the previous year—an increase it attributed in part to Trump's divisive language and the discriminatory measures put forward by his administration.

On September 11, 2018, Minority Rights Group International launched its annual Minority and Indigenous Trends report by hosting a seminar for journalists in Krakow,

Poland. This year, we focused the report on migration and displacement. We chose the theme for two reasons.

One is what I have outlined above—the casual disregard that we have repeatedly witnessed by people in power for the immediate impact of their actions and their words on minority and indigenous communities. Whenever politicians chase voters or news outlets seek to increase their readerships and advertising revenues by targeting migrants, they ignore the very real consequences in terms of increased hatred towards those same communities.

The other reason is that we sought to reflect the lived realities of migrants and refugees themselves—in particular, how discrimination and exclusion drive many people to make the very hard choice to leave their homes. It remains very difficult to arrive at a total percentage of minorities and indigenous peoples among the world's migrants and refugees.

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This is partly due to lack of interest—after all, much of the reporting on migration remains fixated on overall numbers rather than on the individual stories. More particularly, migrants and refugees who belong to minorities or indigenous peoples may well feel a need to remain silent about their ethnicity or religious faith, for fear of further persecution in tran-



The number of migrants trying to cross to Europe through Turkey doubled in 2018. PHOTO: AFP

sit or upon arrival in their new homes.

However, there are many clear indicators from around the world of an immediate causal link between marginalisation and movement. The horrifying targeting of Yazidis by ISIS in Iraq and Syria, as well as more recently of Rohingya by the military and its allies in Myanmar, are by now well-documented. In both cases, the overwhelming majority of the communities have been displaced.

But there are many other examples of membership in minority and indigenous populations and displacement. In Ethiopia, the government's crackdown on political dissent, aimed particularly at the Oromo population, contributed directly to an upsurge in migration from that community. Data collected by the Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat (RMMS) showed that by the beginning of 2017 as many as 89 percent of arriving Ethiopian migrants in the key nearby transit country Yemen stated that they belong to the Oromo community. In Colombia, displacement by armed groups has continued despite the 2016 peace accord.

This disproportionately affects Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities who

made up more than a quarter (26 percent) of the more than 139,000 forcibly displaced in the country between January and October 2017, double their share of the national population as a whole.

In fact, the Colombian example is important as it highlights how, while global attention shifts away from a particular situation, the plight of minorities and indigenous peoples continues. Here, the distinction governments and UN agencies seek to make between refugees on the one hand and migrants on the other becomes blurred and even unhelpful.

The US government denies asylum to victims of Central American gang violence. However, much of the brutal gang-related violence in Guatemala, for instance, has affected indigenous communities disproportionately: decades of conflict and discrimination have left them impoverished and marginalised, with little recourse to protection from police or the judiciary. Indeed, in many cases their situation has been aggravated by official persecution.

The discrimination that caused many migrants and refugees to leave their homes often follows them while in transit. While the abusive treat-

ment of asylum seekers and their families crossing into the US has been widely reported, the crackdown within Mexico on Central American migrants, particularly indigenous community members, has received less coverage.

Significantly, it has resulted not only in the targeting of foreign nationals, including many women and children, but also the arrest and intimidation of indigenous Mexicans by police. Over the past year, reports have emerged from Libya of sub-Saharan Africans trapped by the containment policies of the European Union, who now find themselves targeted by security forces, militias and armed groups. There have been widespread reports of torture, sexual assault and enslavement of migrants, many of whom are vulnerable not only on account of their ethnicity but also as non-Muslims.

The situation is further complicated for groups within minority or indigenous communities, such as women, children, persons with disabilities and LGBTIQ people, who contend with multiple forms of discrimination and as a result face heightened threats of sexual assault, physical attacks and other rights abuses—in their places of origin, whilst in transit and upon arrival at their destinations.

What then is needed? Firstly, all those participating in national and international debates on migration need to tone down their rhetoric. The Danish government could, for instance, have devised policies supporting marginalised urban districts without resorting to the historically loaded term, "ghetto", which immediately stigmatises residents while giving a green light to racists.

Secondly, governments need to abide by fundamental human rights principles, including the basic right to live with dignity. And finally, all those who are contributing to the debate—including media—must get past the numbers and reveal the individual stories. In order to discuss migration, one needs to understand it fully.

Carl Soderbergh is Director of Policy & Communications, Minority Rights Group International. Courtesy: Inter Press Service

QUOTABLE
Quote

GLENN GREENWALD
AMERICAN LAWYER,
JOURNALIST AND AUTHOR

Secrecy is the
lynchpin of abuse of
power, its enabling
force. Transparency is
the only real antidote.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

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26 Help out	5 "Get lost!"	36 Valued wood
27 Microwave	6 Some beers	37 Saddler's tools
sounds	7 Fantastic	38 Watering hole
30 Tuna sandwiches	8 Water cooler	39 Had a snack
32 Useful ability	9 Actor's Signal	40 Pinnacle

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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