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# HCI and Forced Mobility: Revisiting SDGs for the IDPs in Bangladesh

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**Abstract**

Migration is one of the most critical challenges for human civilization, and the modern world is watching countless indescribable consequences of forced migrations all around the world. In this position paper, we limit our interest within the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) who are forcefully displaced inside their national boundaries. We introduce our ongoing initiative to understand, and create awareness of the challenges faced by the IDPs in Bangladesh through ethnography and storytelling. Our work reveals that there are several social, cultural, and political factors associated with the sufferings of the IDPs that are often unaddressed in the mainstream discourse around the crisis of forced migration. We discuss these human factors to re-conceptualize the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the IDPs. At the same time, we intend to provoke discussions around the potential design or policy based interventions to approach these challenges of IDPs.

**Author Keywords**

IDP; voice; Bangladesh; social and cultural factors; SDG.

**ACM Classification Keywords**

H.1.2. User/Machine Systems (Human Factors)



**Fig 1:** Alamgir moved to Dhaka from Chandpur, as he lost all his lands to the river. He regrets that he cannot educate his girls in this new place, because both of his little income and the lack of security for women.

## Introduction

Bangladesh is a disaster-prone country, and it is one of the most vulnerable place to the risk of climate change and global warming [3]. Preliminary estimates indicate that the total number of people at risk of sea-level rise in Bangladesh could be 26 million [5]. Thousands of people leave their households and belongings due to landslide, flood, and drought every year in Bangladesh, and they are forced to migrate to the highlands [4]. Besides, these environmental catastrophes also create acute economic crises that force people to move to the huge number of IDPs are exposed to several economic, health-related, environmental, social, and political problems that reveals the nuances of forced migrations [6]. We study several groups of IDPs in Bangladesh both for finding a sustainable HCI support for their rehabilitation, and for understanding the deeper challenges of forced migrations for the refugees that go beyond the limits of the national boundaries.

The Sustainable Development Goals (GDGs) announced by United Nations have charted 17 goals to be met by 2030 for the improvement of the quality human life on earth [7]. These goals include poverty elimination, gender equality, healthcare, education, climate action, and infrastructural development among others. Different nations have announced their programs targeting these goals worldwide. However, the uncertain mobility caused by forced migrations has challenged most of these development programs, and made us rethink the development plans for the migrants. This problem has called for a separate re-consideration of the sustainable development goals for the forcefully migrated people including the refugees and IDPs.

To this end, we focus on understanding the problems faced by the IDPs in Bangladesh from the ground. We combine ethnography and storytelling for our work to make the voices of the IDPs heard by a wide range of people around the world, and create a discourse around them. For the last six months, we have visited five sites in Bangladesh where IDPs have made temporary settlements, and we have made biographies of more than 25 IDPs. During this period, we have also talked to more than 50 people in those areas, made extensive fieldnotes about their household, health condition, educational facilities, law and order, economic crises, and the future directions of their lives. All the fieldnotes were later translated into English and transcribed.

Besides analyzing the field data, we present a select set of stories in a concise form on a website [2]. The objective of this website is to create a database of stories of IDPs for future research on finding the major changes in their lives. The primary analysis of our field data reveals a set of social and cultural challenges that have deeply impacted the lives of IDPs. In this paper, we intend to bring those forward, and discuss those from different HCI perspectives to seek design and policy level interventions to support their lives.

## Social Problems Faced by the IDPs

In our field study, we came to know about a set of social problems that many of the IDPs frequently confront in Bangladesh. In this section, we briefly describe a select set of those problems:

- a) **Loosing Social Status:** Most of the senior IDPs have reported to us that they have lost their social status due to their forced migration. This has caused significant



**Fig 2:** Selina moved to Dhaka from Jhalakathi with his brother because of extreme poverty. She is worried because her brother got addicted to drugs. She blames the bad company her brother got in this new area that they are now living in.

psychological impact on them. Additionally, they believe that they are not treated well because of the lack of their social status. Social status is also a big problem for these people because that controls several important phases of their lives including marriage and business.

In several incidents, the IDPs told us stories of their old communities, and mentioned how they were being respected by others. Because of their forced migration, they are now living with a new set of people, who are not aware of their social reputation. The familial legacies, which they hold close to their heart, are now not relevant to the people they are living with.

- b) **Lack of Attachment:** Another severe problem that we often found with the IDPs was their lack of attachment with the current context. Not only the current setting is foreign to them, they struggle to envision their future through this. A farmer who used to live in a village, for example, had a hard time to live in a place in the city where he cannot farm. He may have an alternate profession of pulling rickshaws, but he still does not know the long-term future of this profession.

This tension is compounded by the uncertainty of their mobilities, too. Many of them do not know if they will be living in this particular place with this particular profession for long either. Hence, the mode of their life is “here and now”, that impedes any long-term plan or vision.

- c) **Exploitation:** Almost all the IDPs that we interviewed mentioned the infrastructural violence that they undergo. A big number of them mentioned the unavailability of proper support from the law enforcement agencies. The women in IDP families are often exposed to sexual harassment. The local shopkeepers often demand higher prices to the IDPs than to the local people. Besides, there are several stories of theft, abuses, and deprivations that the IDPs face in their daily life. The Police, instead of supporting the IDPs, often demand bribes from them. Since many of these IDPs live on government lands “illegally”, they cannot protest these.

These IDPs are also politically exploited. Since most of them do not have the voting right in the area they now live in, the local political leaders do not care about their problems. In many cases, the people of the local political leaders even use their political power to rob these IDPs.

### **HCI, SDGs, and Forced Migrations**

A growing literature inside HCI scholarship has been focusing on the challenges on refugees, which are often limited within the functional needs of the migrated people including health-related problems, communication support, connecting with local communities, education, and financial support. While many of those studies are relevant to the IDPs, our study reveals a unique set of problems grounded in the social and political contexts that have not been addressed well in literature.

Next, we see these social problems are essentially creating obstacles toward advancing the SDGs for the IDPs. For example, due to the “illegal” status, these people are often being deprived of legal support, and hence women are being publicly harassed by the local goons. The SDG for gender equity hence has been more difficult in this scenario, because of the limitations with legal infrastructure for the IDPs. Similarly, due to the lack of social status, IDPs are getting less financial options, and less opportunities to flourish their innovation and creativity. HCI research on sustainability has long been emphasizing on a comprehensive program for approaching the SDGs instead of solving immediate problems. However, very few HCI research have pointed out the tensions associated with forced mobilities and incorporated that with sustainable HCI.

Finally, we believe that the problems that the IDPs are facing are opening new opportunities of designing and policy-making. Our ongoing efforts include a storytelling platform for the IDPs where they can share stories of their past, and hence can make a way to restore their social status [2]. We are also designing to connect this people with the local humanitarian organizations through private information channels so that they can get secured help. At the same time, we are building ubiquitous computing techniques that are more supportive to forced mobilities [1]. However, most of the problem with the IDPs are very complex, and they require much more attention from HCI communities.

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