

# Policy Opportunities and Constraints for Addressing Urban Precarity of Migrant Populations

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## Abstract

Addressing sources and drivers of precarity among marginalized migrant populations in urban spaces is central to making cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable for all. Yet dominant policy discourses continue to frame migrants as problematic causes of insecurity and tend to exclude them from policy processes. Deliberative democratic theory suggests that inclusive processes have the potential to create innovative solutions for resilient cities. This study elicits and reports on self-identified sources of precarity and insecurity as experienced by new low-income migrant populations. It combines visual ethnography and deliberative democracy tools in an action research process that facilitated dialogue between migrant populations, urban planners and policy stakeholders. The objective is to elicit policy opportunities and constraints for changing dominant discourses, with a view to enhance marginalized lives and to implement sustainable urban infrastructure in Chattogram, the second largest city of Bangladesh. The results show options for addressing precarity, developed through facilitating migrants and planners to engage with each other's perspectives. Priorities include focusing on insecure tenure, exposure to environmental hazards, and representation in planning processes. Integrating the perspectives and lived experiences of migrant urban populations into policy processes potentially leads to more effective, sustainable and legitimate solutions.

## Policy Implications

- Mainstreaming deliberative and participatory processes into urban planning and policymaking has the potential to improve legitimacy and compliance with decisions and to foster sustainable and inclusive urban development.
- Urban development policies currently focus on the planning and development of infrastructure, services and industries, but need to explicitly recognize the needs and requirements of new urban migrants who are differentially affected by urban precarity, depending on age, gender, ethnicity and geographic location.
- As demonstrated in the lived experiences of migrants in Bangladesh, urban precarity is a multidimensional condition with intertwined material and social components. Urban planning and policy need to reach beyond incomes and housing to also include skills, education, security and social networks as urgent policy priorities.
- Relevant government agencies in Bangladesh could review existing policies and strategies, including current approaches of treating migration as a failure of local level adaptation.
- The government of Bangladesh may consider preparing policies on internal migrants that would address different manifestations of urban precarity of new migrants. These should consider providing access to public facilities and services including health, education, social protection and secured tenure services for new migrants. They should further ensure the accountability of employers to provide adequate working conditions and fair wages to all migrants, regardless of age, gender or ethnic identity.

## 1. Migration and urban precarity

Migration is a pathway out of poverty for many. Yet contemporary flows of migrants in cities lead to populations clustering in neighbourhoods characterized by insecure tenure, high rents, poor access to services and labour markets, and disproportionate exposure to environmental hazards such as flooding or landslides (Banks et al., 2011; Chu and Michael, 2019; Tacoli et al., 2015). Thus, many migrants experience precarity in urban destinations entrenched in the informality of settlements and livelihoods (Chu and Michael, 2019; Tacoli et al., 2015) and epitomized by truncated citizenship and precarious labour (Ricceri, 2011).

In this study, precarity is conceptualized as the experience of material scarcity, exploitative labour relations and multidimensional insecurity. Bourdieu (1963) used *précarité* to describe the condition of casual workers, while the term precarity has come to denote conditions of instability, lack of security, and the presence of social and economic vulnerability in diverse economies (Dorre et al., 2006; Rogers and Rogers, 1989). Standing (2014) defines the precariat as an emerging class characterized by insecurity across three crucial domains: labour, income and rights. Indeed, contemporary social justice movements point to conditions such as exclusion from public welfare and struggle for recognition as central to the experience of precarity (Waite, 2009).

Theories of deliberative democracy suggest that political processes that increase the inclusiveness of diverse perspectives can help overcome the injustices associated with political marginalization. Importantly, deliberation is also claimed to lead to more effective and legitimate decision-making. At their core, such theories suggest that deliberation, as a social and political process, is fundamental to democracy itself as it promotes innovation and introduces new options into planning processes (Dryzek, 2012; Young, 1999). Much advocacy of deliberation also highlights that plurality in voices and opinions is beneficial without a specific need for consensus. Often the creation of a deliberative process builds solidarity and policy innovation by stealth. The greatest obstacle to deliberative democracy remains highly uneven power asymmetries (Dryzek et al., 2019a; Vlerick, 2020). Yet, deliberation is common across different political systems, even in authoritarian and hierarchical political settings (Curato et al., 2017).

There are a wide variety of methods and so-called experiments in deliberation, notably in urban planning (Bulkeley and Castan Broto, 2013; Caprotti and Cowley, 2017). Formal methods range from citizens' juries to online polling, while much deliberation is informal and based on activist citizen movements. New technologies and new forms of mobility have been shown to enhance effective deliberation, particularly for urban planning, and to include previously invisible voices.

But can participation and deliberation really help to overcome exclusion and social marginalization? Critics have highlighted limited success in real-world experiments with deliberation, especially where structural inequalities in societies are pervasive (Fraser, 1992; Hendriks, 2009). In

particular, different democrats argue that it is overly simplistic to assume that prevailing conditions of power and dominant discourses or biases can be completely set aside during deliberation (Fraser, 1992). However, these challenges can be overcome through design that embraces cultural and social differences in deliberation and creates an enabling space for dialogue through mindful selection of participants, use of narrative approaches and empathetic listening (Dryzek et al., 2019b; Zapata, 2009). Therefore, deliberation is better understood as a mechanism for procedural inclusion that neither guarantees equality nor requires consensus, and instead allows for diverse views and opinions to enter the decision-making arena.

In migration studies, precarity most commonly focuses on labour dimensions: precarity is often used to describe low-skilled migrants engaged in work that is insecure, involving long hours and compensated with sub-minimum wages, with little legal protection (Anderson and Rogaly, 2005; Mackenzie and Forde, 2007; Platt et al., 2017). These conditions, however, represent wide asymmetrical power relations running through systems of urban life for migrants in rapidly growing cities. The processes that generate dense urban neighbourhoods also produce uncertainty and instability that characterize almost every aspect of urban residents' access to basic services such as water, electricity, housing, education and health care. Thus, precarity is a pervasive and enduring feature of the human condition caused by deep structural inequality (Ettlinger, 2007). The challenges faced by migrants in rapidly growing urban centres, in the global South in particular, reinforce the interpretation of precarity as both a generalized condition of marginalized population groups and a potential point for mobilization that enables individuals experiencing urban vulnerability to engage in concerted actions with those in positions of power.

Migrants' agency to contest precarity is constrained by a lack of recognition in policies that fail to incorporate migrants' lived experiences of social exclusion, material hardship and exposure to environmental hazards (Schlossberg, 2004). Migrant populations frequently lack political representation due to lack of social capital and networks of patronage (Chu and Michael, 2019). Migrant groups tend to have few opportunities and lack necessary political leverage to influence urban policy agendas (Banks et al., 2011; Chu and Michael, 2019). Government agencies have little motivation to serve non-powerful actors and migrants have limited scope to hold politicians accountable (Banks et al., 2011). As such, low-income migrants' needs are often underserved or completely neglected in urban policy and planning.

In many cases, migrant populations are actively stigmatized and portrayed as sources of social problems, including criminality, in urban planning and policy. Stereotyping discourses frame migrants as unwanted 'encroachers' or intruders that threaten orderly and progressive urban spaces (Bhan, 2009, 2014). Policy makers and planners thus commonly view migration as a brake on urban development and blame migrants for entrenching poverty (McGranahan et al., 2016). Othering discourses, in turn, justify exclusionary

policies and create a hostile environment for new migrant populations. These policies are implicitly designed to disincentivize rural-urban migration by withholding essential services and making settlements undesirable places to live (McGranahan et al., 2016; Tacoli et al., 2015). The surge of informal settlements in urban areas has been argued to be the direct result of intentional policy neglect (McGranahan et al., 2016). Others highlight that while such efforts to curb rural-urban migration have not worked, they have created hardship and widened inequality (Tacoli et al., 2015). The exclusion of migrants from urban spaces is often coupled with intentional political marginalization, manifest in the denial of or limited access to essential citizenship rights (Banks et al., 2011; McGranahan et al., 2016; Tacoli et al., 2015), which further hamper migrants' ability to contest discrimination and demand the remediation of prevailing injustices that perpetuate precarity.

In our conceptualization, therefore, precarity circumscribes the spatial, socio-economic and political marginalization, where marginalization is understood as involuntary exclusion of migrants from participating in society due to a state of relative deprivation in multiple dimensions of life (Wong et al., 2007). Precarity is not experienced in a homogenous manner, instead it is often characterized by varying degrees of marginalization intersecting, among others, with gender and ethnicity (Bürkner, 2012; Fantone, 2007). How can such marginalization be overcome? It is recognized that while precarity is an outcome or product of structures, processes, policies and politics, it could also act as a potent catalyst for resistance capable of challenging the dominant political economy of migration of which precarity is symptomatic (Schierup et al., 2015).

Building on these insights, this study is designed to combine visual ethnography and deliberative democracy tools in an action research process to initiate dialogue between migrant populations and urban planners and policy

stakeholders in Chattogram. Building on evidence from scholarship on urban poverty that identifies migrant populations as particularly vulnerable to experiences of precarity (e.g. Afsar, 1999; Banks et al., 2011; Begum, 1999; Bhagat, 2017), we develop an understanding of lived experiences of precarity among migrants. Insights from in-depth engagement with migrants through photovoice and photo-elicitation interviews and a review of relevant Bangladeshi policies revealed a number of distributional and procedural injustices that perpetuate precarity. To overcome these challenges, the study intervened through action research to enhance the deliberative democratic nature of planning for sustainability in an urban setting. The article reports on findings from this process and highlights policy opportunities identified through democratic deliberation in Chattogram, Bangladesh.

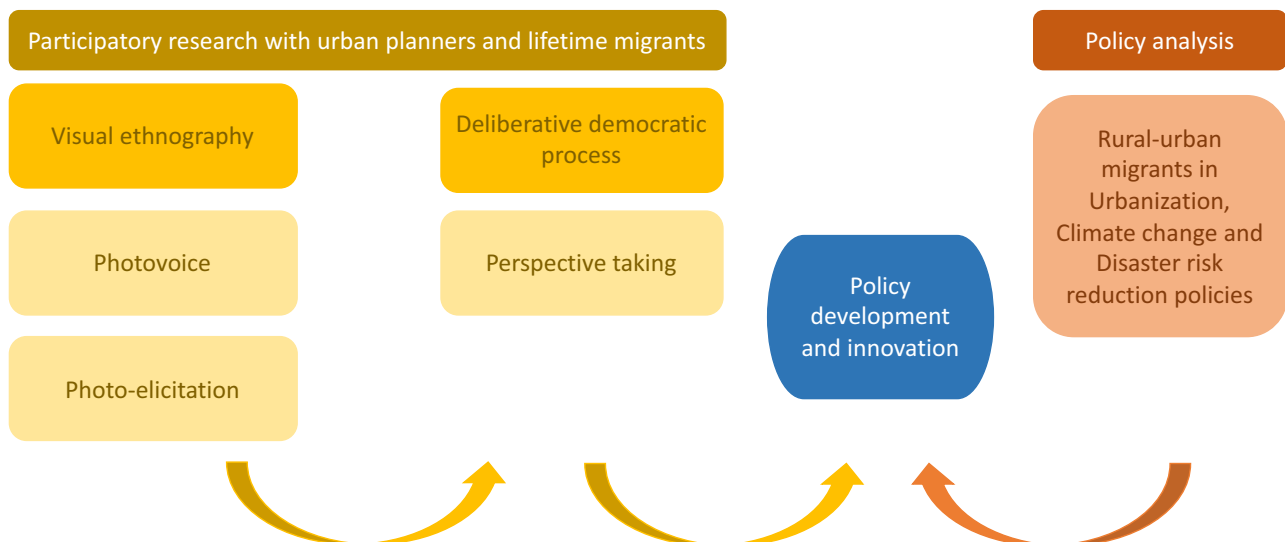
## 2. Addressing urban precarity through deliberative participatory processes

We combined multiple methods and action research with migrants and city planners in Chattogram, Bangladesh in order to: (1) explore migrants' subjective experiences of insecurity and precarity in Chattogram; (2) to identify dominant discourses about migrants in relevant Bangladeshi policies; and (3) to elicit opportunities for and barriers to integrating migrants' perspectives into urban planning and policy. These processes involved multiple interactions and iterations over eighteen months in 2018 and 2019, as depicted in Figure 1.

### 2.1. Research design in Chattogram largest

Chattogram is the second largest city of Bangladesh and a common destination for domestic migrants (Siddiqui et al., 2017; Siddiqui and Mahmud, 2014). It is the primary sea port

**Figure 1.** Multi-method participatory action research over 18 months with urban planners and migrants in Chattogram



of Bangladesh and the location of the largest export processing zone comprising garment and manufacturing industries, attracting workers from different parts of the country (BIGD, 2014), including ethnic migrants from Chittagong Hill Tracts (Chakma and Akhy, 2015). The city has seen rapid growth with the population of its metropolitan area surpassing four million in 2011, a trend that is expected to continue until 2025 when the city's population is projected to reach 6.8 million (Mia et al., 2015) through sustained migration (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2015). Migrants constitute 62 per cent of Chattogram's population (Rahman, 2014, 2016). Low-income migrants are concentrated in under-serviced hazard-prone informal settlements (Ashraf and Chowdhury, 2009; Uddin, 2018). There are over 2,000 of these named settlements in Chattogram housing 22 per cent of the city's population, approximately 1.8 million people (Uddin, 2018). It has been shown across Asia that migrants tend to cluster in under-resourced informal settlements where they endure exposure to environmental hazards, material hardship and systematic exclusion from labour markets and governance processes (Afsar, 1999; Rains and Krishna, 2020), reinforced by the broader political economy of urban informality (Banks, 2016; Banks, Lombard and Mitlin, 2020).

## 2.2. Participatory action research with migrants and planners

The project engaged ten migrants and seven city planners in an in-depth action research process over 18 months. Participants were recruited through networks of the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit whose contacts enabled access to migrants and city planners. The participants were selected using maximum variation purposive sampling (Bryman, 2008) focusing on those participants with direct lived experience of urban insecurity (Creswell and Clark, 2011; Palinkas et al., 2015; Patton, 1990). The purposive sample was designed to capture a diversity of gender, age, ethnicity, length of residence and occupation types. The sample included ethnic minority migrants from the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) area, who represent the largest ethnic minority in the city (Mia et al., 2015). The sample of urban planners included key representatives of Chattogram's urban planning and governance context, such as the Chittagong City Corporation (CCC) and the Chittagong Development Authority (CDA). The activities received ethical approval from the University of Exeter, and informed consent was obtained from all participants.

The action research consisted of three key phases: photovoice, perspective-taking workshops, and policy workshops. First, participants were invited to take part in a visual ethnographic activity, with the purpose of developing an inductive understanding of what insecurity means in the context of migration and rapid urbanization, and what migrants' insights and personal experiences may mean for developing sustainable and resilient cities. An inductive, participant driven definition reflects the values and perspectives

of research participants, recognizing that constructs of human security are embedded in the wider social, cultural and political context (Deneulin and McGregor, 2009). The activity involved photovoice, a method in which participants take photographs that depict aspects of their everyday experience (Petermans et al., 2014; Warren, 2005). Participants generated images for two weeks, followed by in-depth interviews using their photographs to stimulate narratives of lived experiences of places, events and phenomena (Kolb, 2008; Ortega-Alcázar and Dyck, 2012).

Photo-based approaches create shared insights and multiple meanings of specific life experiences, the settings that give rise to them, and the social forces that shape meanings (Stedman et al., 2004). Prior accounts of urban insecurity using photo-elicitation have shown that it can challenge stereotypes in policy discourses about marginalized or minority groups (Ortega-Alcázar and Dyck, 2012). In this study participants were charged to capture aspects of their everyday insecurity and the factors that shape their wellbeing. The resulting photographs were thematically ordered by participants during a pile sorting exercise (Bernard, 2011). Participants were asked to group photographs using their own criteria for determining which images belong together. The reasoning for each pile was discussed during photo-elicitation interviews and ranged from images reflecting a particular dimension of urban insecurity to depicting circumstances that lead to insecurity. Photographs were thus used as visual prompts to develop an inductive understanding of manifestations of urban precarity and their impact on migrant's multidimensional wellbeing.

Second, participants engaged in a so-called perspective-taking workshop, to foster dialogue between city planners and migrants with the help of visual images as catalysts for building empathy through taking others' perspectives. Empathy, or the emotional and cognitive engagement with others' experiences and emotional responses to these, has been argued to motivate actions towards improved outcomes that foster sustainability (Brown et al., 2019). Workshop participants deliberated possible ways to address multiple challenges of living in a densely populated rapidly growing city. The process of taking each other's perspective with the help of photographs and facilitated discussions, enabled participants to propose solutions that incorporate the lived experiences of diverse stakeholders. Information elicited during the perspective-taking workshop was complemented by preparatory focus groups and follow-up interviews with city planners and migrants.

Preparatory focus groups, two with migrants and one with planners, allowed participants to practice taking others' perspectives in their peer groups ahead of the perspective-taking event. Discussions during focus groups yielded insights on the causes and manifestations of urban precarity. Follow-up interviews were conducted with a sample of migrants and planners following the perspective-taking workshop and sought reflections on the perspective-taking process and, in the case of planners, suggestions of key policy stakeholders for inclusion in planned policy workshops.

The third phase consisted of two policy workshops: a workshop in Chattogram and a national policy workshop in Dhaka. The workshops included participation by key policy and planning stakeholders, including the Mayor of Chattogram, the chief planner of Chittagong Development Authority, the national Minister of Planning and the Minister of Disaster Management and Relief along with representatives of academic institutions, and civil society organizations. Policy and planning officials reflected on sources of precarity and insecurity affecting the lives of migrants. Findings from the participatory research were enriched by the testimonies of volunteer representatives of migrant participants at each workshop in order to stimulate discussion among policy stakeholders about identifying policy priorities and opportunities for integrating migrant voices into planning activities.

### 2.3. Content analysis of Bangladeshi policies

In addition to emerging findings from photo-elicitation and perspective-taking activities, a content analysis of relevant policy documents was carried out. The analysis focused on three areas of policy highly relevant for governing rural-urban migration in Bangladesh: urbanization, climate change adaptation and disaster management policies (Table 1), as identified by policy stakeholders.

The content of policy documents was analysed to elicit how policies portrayed rural-urban migration. Policy documents were categorized by how they represent migration flows: migrants are either: (1) invisible; (2) regarded as sources of problems; or (3) considered integral to urban development as sources of labour. The categorization builds on Martin et al.'s (2017) analysis of Bangladeshi policies in the context of climate-influenced migration. Existing gaps and dominant discourses about migration in current policies were drawn out and reflected on during the policy workshops. Participants, in particular policy stakeholders, identified potential entry points for the future integration of migrants' lived experiences of urban spaces into mainstream policies.

## 3. Insights from participatory action research

### 3.1. Rural-urban migrants in Bangladeshi policies

Analysis of Bangladeshi policies on urbanization, climate change adaptation and disaster and risk management reveal that discourses surrounding migration in these documents are closely aligned with three dominant discourses: that migration is unaccounted for and in essence invisible; that migration is overall portrayed as a source of social problems and challenges; or that migration is principally a labour market issue. The distribution of these three discourses in relevant Bangladeshi policies is shown in Table 2. In effect, rural-urban migrants mostly remain invisible or become problematized in the reviewed Bangladeshi policies, and their contribution to economic development is seldom acknowledged.

A number of urbanization and disaster management policies target the needs of disadvantaged groups and set out to improve security of tenure, living conditions in city slums

**Table 1.** Current Bangladesh national policies on urbanization, climate change and disaster management analyzed for implicit and explicit discourses on migration and development

Title	Year	Issuing body
<b>Urbanization Policies</b>		
National Housing Authority Act	2000	Ministry of Housing and Public Works
National Urbanization Policy (draft)	2014	Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives
National Housing Policy	2016	Ministry of Housing and Public Works
Urban and Regional Planning Act (draft)	2017	Ministry of Housing and Public Works
<b>Climate Change Adaptation Policies</b>		
National Adaptation Action Plan (NAPA)	2009	Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change
Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (BCCSAP)	2009	Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change
Climate Change Trust Act (MoEF, 2010)	2010	Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change
Bangladesh Climate Change Gender Action Plan (BCCGAP) (MoEF, 2013)	2013	Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change
<b>Disaster Management Policies</b>		
Disaster Management Act (MoDMR, 2012)	2012	Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief
Disaster Management Policy (MoDMR, 2015a)	2015	Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief
National Strategy on the Management of Disaster and Climate-Induced Internal Displacement (NSMDCIID) 2015	2015	Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief

and squatters, to reduce risks and hazards or to enhance the participation of marginalized groups (MoDMR, 2015a; MoHPW, 2000, 2016; MoLGRDC, 2014). It could be argued that these policies thus also target migrants, most of whom are low-income, vulnerable and live in hazard-prone informal settlements. However, migrants face additional challenges in urban destinations, yet they remain elusive in policies that fail to incorporate them as explicit beneficiaries. For example, the National Housing Authority Act 2000 aspires to address accommodation shortage and quality by creating low-cost housing and offering assistance to destitute women, the disadvantaged and those affected by disaster in urban and rural areas but avoids mentioning migrants. While, indeed, migrants could still benefit from such policy provisions, it emerged that in some cases commitment to improve marginalized lives is coupled with an implicit anti-migration narrative (MoLGRDC, 2017), or worse, migrants are explicitly termed as problematic, hampering

**Table 2.** Distribution of three discourses of rural-urban migration in Bangladesh urbanization, climate change and disaster policies

Policy type and title	Conceptualization of migration		
	Invisible	Sources of problems	Source of labour
Urbanization Policies			
National Housing Authority Act	✓		
National Urbanization Policy (draft)	✓	✓	
National Housing Policy		✓	
Urban and Regional Planning Act (draft)	✓	✓	
Climate Change Adaptation Policies			
National Adaptation Action Plan (NAPA)		✓	
Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (BCCSAP)		✓	
Climate Change Trust Act	✓		
Bangladesh Climate Change Gender Action Plan (BCCGAP)			✓
Disaster Management Policies			
Disaster Management Act	✓		
Disaster Management Policy	✓		
National Strategy on the Management of Disaster and Climate-Induced Internal Displacement (NSMDCIID)			✓

the achievement of orderly urban growth and planning (e.g. MoHPW, 2016).

Problematising migrants as sources of urban precarity, poverty and crime, is mainly characteristic of the reviewed urbanization and climate change adaptation policies. These sentiments are manifest in discourses of unplanned urbanization, framed as a hindrance to planned growth and development (MoEF, 2009a; MoHPW, 2016). Such policies discourage and call for the need to halt rural-urban migration (MoLGRDC, 2017) and envisage the 'rehabilitation' of migrants back to their origin as a potential solution (MoEF, 2009a; MoHPW, 2016). While climate change and disaster management policies acknowledge that the displacement and mobility of people can be partly attributed to climate hazards, they view migration as a failure of local adaptation and are reluctant to recognize migration as a valid adaptation strategy (MoDMR, 2015a; MoEF, 2009b). This is evident in their focus on providing support and capacity building to affected populations only in places of origin. They propose future plans for rural growth centers and secondary cities to alleviate unplanned urbanization and to receive displaced rural populations (MoEF, 2009b, MoLGRDC, 2014). Where movement is inevitable, it is suggested that people should be resettled abroad (MoEF, 2009a).

More recent policies such as the National Strategy on the Management of Disaster and Climate-Induced Internal

Displacement 2015 (MoDMR, 2015b), however, begin to recognize rural-urban migration as an important adaptation response, as well as an opportunity for employment creation and economic development. The Bangladesh Climate Change Gender Action Plan 2013 (MoEF, 2013) advocates for female climate migrants' employment and housing needs in urban destination, and also highlights the role of women in local level adaptation in origin areas. While international migration as a source of economic development has been long supported and safeguarded in Bangladesh, evidenced by the creation of the Overseas Employment and Migrants Act 2013, a similar legal framework to protect internal migrants' rights in urban destinations is still absent.

### 3.2. Urban precarity and insecurity of migrants in Chattogram

Migrants' narrative accounts from the photovoice and photo-elicitation interviews reveal diverse manifestations of urban precarity that affect multiple dimensions of wellbeing (Figure 2). Insecurity was articulated beyond material wellbeing to include health, education, dignity, nutrition, and social wellbeing. These aspects of wellbeing were largely intertwined through conditionality or trade-offs, and their achievement was mediated by social and environmental factors ranging from age, gender, religion and ethnicity to water logging and risk of landslides.

Migrants' material wellbeing in the city was defined by experiences of housing and income insecurity, exacerbated by a perceived lack of social security or credit facilities to fall back on during times of hardship or sickness. Participants' homes are located in the hills surrounding the city or in low-lying areas in close proximity to the Karnaphuli river and its adjacent canals, where water logging and landslides are common occurrences during monsoon season, jeopardizing migrants' health, lives and material possessions. Densely occupied 'colonies' lack basic facilities for sanitation, clean drinking water and reliable supply of cooking gas and electricity, infringing on migrants' quality of life:

If the gas and water supply is adequate, then I could cook my own food which isn't possible at the moment. The gas supply comes after ten in the night, which is really distressing. (CHT female migrant)

The colony I live in has 35 rooms but only two toilets. The picture is about the queue of the toilet. All these people are standing in a queue to use the toilets in the morning. (Bengali male migrant)

Owing to the cost of water, migrants resorted to saving rain water or fetched water from the polluted river when public water facilities provided by the authorities were captured by powerful individuals who imposed charges on community members:

We can collect motor water from that place, but it will be 60 taka per month which is hard for us to pay ... the motor was given by the government to

help the poor section of the locality. But some dishonest and locally powerful men have captured it and now they are using it as a mode of exploiting the poorer section. (Bengali female migrant)

The photo narratives revealed that migrants' access to better living conditions hinged on their irregular and fragile incomes, that are consequential to informal sector jobs held by most participants who work as street hawkers, rickshaw pullers, sawmill operators, or in scrap warehouses. They often juggled several occupations to make ends meet:

I work as a fish retailer. I buy fish and sell them here. During another season I sell fruits. Sometimes I paddle rickshaw in the city. (Bengali male migrant)

Only few participants were able to gain work in the export processing zones (EPZ), which were perceived as more desirable, however unattainable for many unskilled, undereducated, elderly or underage migrants. The precarity of incomes and housing tenure had a knock-on effect on migrants' nutrition, health, dignity and education.

Poor living conditions are manifest in health and safety hazards, poor facilities, and unreliable incomes at work, and cause physical ailments and psychological distress among migrants. For example, migrants in the garment scrap industry complained about skin and respiratory conditions due to exposure to dust and mold for the lack of protective clothing:

In my workplace there is too much warm and dust. People get sick from it. They get mainly fever and cold ... There are no fans where we work, dust is everywhere. (Bengali female migrant)

Migrants experience fear and stress due to housing and income insecurity, the inability to meet basic needs for nutrition and sanitation, and suffer from fatigue and exhaustion as a result of working long hours amidst poor conditions:

We have to wake up at 5am in the morning to go to office and work all day standing. The work starts at 8am until 7pm. We are given an hour lunch break, so we have to work 10 hours a day. We don't get to rest at all after the lunch break. It is very tiring for me. (CHT female migrant)

Education was perceived to be a pre-condition of better material and health outcomes, as it played a key role in facilitating access to better-paid formal sector employment. Nevertheless, tuition and school fees or childcare were unaffordable for many low-income migrants who were trapped in precarious jobs and feared that their children would get involved in underaged labour or worse, in criminal or illicit pursuits:

The children who are in the picture are growing up without the guidance of their parents. As their parents work, they go out for work early in the morning and come back at dusk. In this time they roam here and there. They don't go to school as their

parents earn very little which is not adequate for spending on education. (Bengali male migrant)

Women complained of the absence of adequate and affordable childcare facilities for working mothers and felt guilt for compromising the health and safety of their children.

### 3.3. Cultural determinants of urban precarity experiences

While precarity characterized the lives of all migrants in this study, experiences of insecurity depended on age, gender and ethnicity, and affected different dimensions of wellbeing for different groups. How precarity was experienced at the intersection of gender and ethnicity was further shaped by underlying social, cultural and religious norms. Thus variations in experiences of precarity were apparent between muslim Bengali migrants and Buddhist CHT groups.

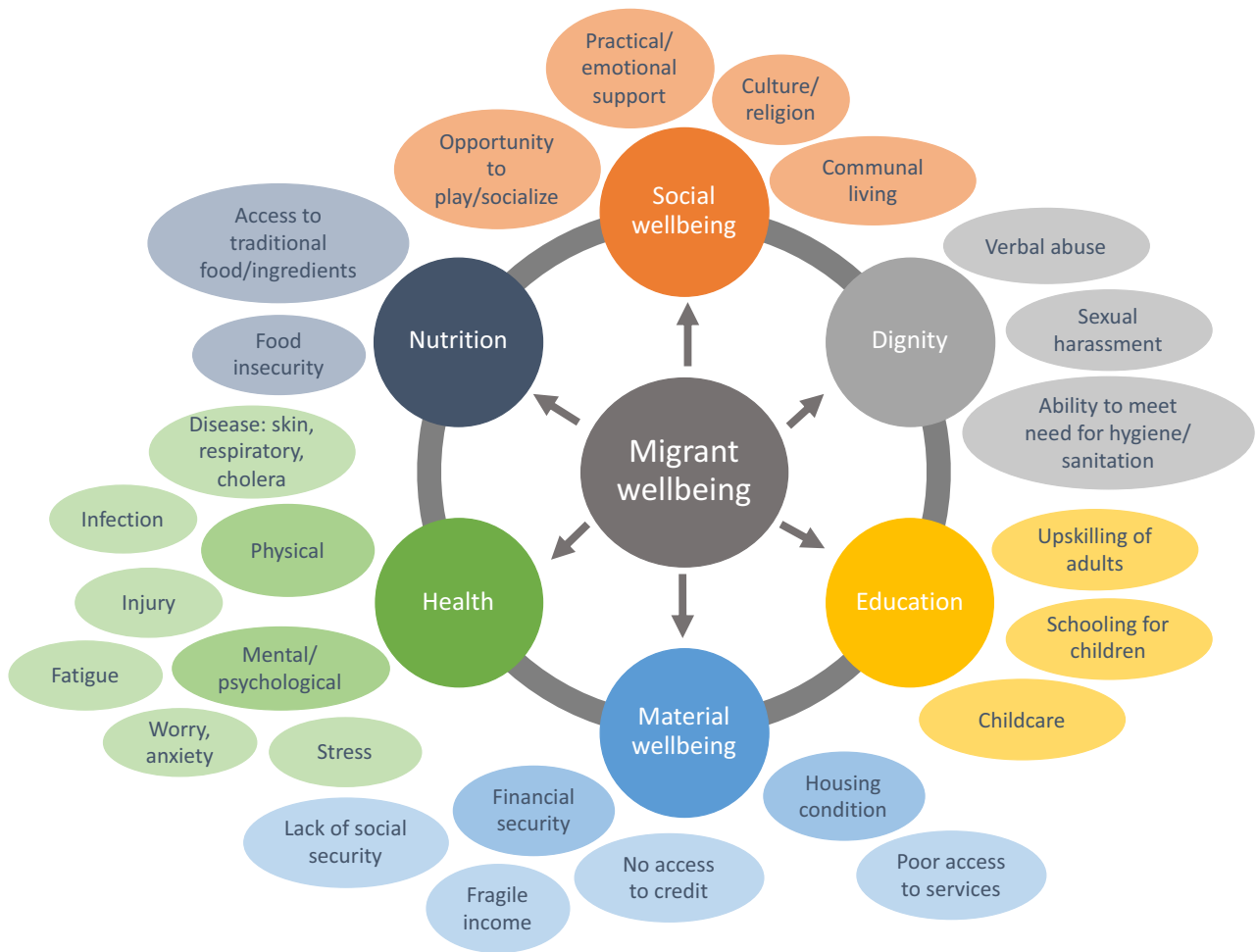
Chittagong Hill Tracts migrants gained a distinct sense of wellbeing from preserving their customs, preparing traditional dishes, and performing religious rituals in their new urban settings. However, initially, CHT migrants faced challenges in terms of space for religious and spiritual congregation, while these were readily available for Bengali migrants. Therefore, political support to build a Buddhist temple had a transformative effect on the social wellbeing of the entire CHT community:

We are living there for 26 years. There was no temple for us. But when the new government was formed in 2010, the new MP constructed a temple for us. I am a Buddhist. The people have taken this very positively. Earlier the situation wasn't like this. There was no place to perform our religious rituals, which has changed now. (CHT male migrant)

While female migrants of Bengali and CHT origin were both preoccupied with poor access to services within their residences that infringed on food security and negatively affected health outcomes, Bengali women in our sample experienced additional grievances. Bengali women felt that their dignity was eroded through lack of privacy and incidents of verbal and sexual harassment for the lack of adequate sanitation and hygiene facilities in densely populated 'colonies'. Overall, CHT migrants in this study were more successful at securing better housing compared to Bengali groups. They subscribed to distinct cultural and religious norms, which permitted co-habiting between (unrelated) males and females, and as such they could spread the cost of living between several working individuals who shared rent. As a result, they could access more permanent structures with some amenities such as a private washroom.

Further benefits of communal living among CHT migrants were manifest in practical and emotional support to each other and enhanced social wellbeing, which translated into an expansion of opportunities available to CHT migrants. For example, they were able to pursue further education alongside work: 'I am studying here. I don't face any problems because my brother cooks, then I get time for studying'. (CHT female migrant)

**Figure 2.** Dimensions of wellbeing affected by perceived insecurity articulated by migrant populations in Chattogram



Indeed, CHT migrants emphasized the role of education for social mobility and made concerted efforts to invest in further schooling and skill acquisition, which, in turn, afforded them access to better-paid occupations in the formal sector and EPZ factories. Whereas, work and education were described as irreconcilable by most Bengali migrants who perceived trade-offs between their own aspirations and obligation towards family members leaving their ambitions towards education or upskilling unfulfilled:

I: You can learn a different work by leaving this one.

M: But in this way I won't be able to help my family. (Bengali female migrant)

### 3.4. Opportunities and challenges in addressing migrants' precarity

City planners and migrants suggested numerous planning interventions that were framed around alleviating experiences

of precarity and improving the liveability of Chattogram. They identified three possible arenas for action, based on: (1) where migrants live; (2) where migrants work; and (3) how the city works.

Planners and migrants both proposed a range of solutions and achieved consensus on many, though not all topics (see Appendix). Opinions diverged about sources of precarity and solutions linked to the urban infrastructure and practices dimensions of how the city works. For example, though city planners and migrants both recognized that traffic congestion and waste pollution hamper the liveability of the city, migrants attributed these to gaps in service provision, maintenance or enforcement. City planners, on the other hand, blamed human practices and behaviours such as waste dumping and emphasized the need for improved service uptake and adherence to rules and norms by urban dwellers.

Additionally, planners cited several challenges that constrained their ability to action solutions towards enhancing sustainable urban development and improve the lived experiences of low-income populations. They acknowledged that



migrants' precarity and vulnerability in urban destinations is exacerbated by their invisibility in policy circles due to a lack of representation, social integration and political leverage:

Most of the time we consider them as invisible ... They remain invisible because of the lack of adequate data and the ignorance of the mainstream population. (Policy stakeholder, Dhaka policy workshop)

Planners agreed that existing policy processes failed to engage with low-income migrants, who continue to be viewed as sources of problems, rather than sources of development and innovation in dominant policy discourses. Most planners involved in the research recognized that incorporating migrants' perspectives into policy decisions about planning and interventions could improve legitimacy and compliance.

However, city planners emphasized that political will alone is often not sufficient for addressing existing precarity, as positive initiatives at the local level were constrained by bureaucratic red tape and a system of rigid institutional hierarchy. While policy stakeholders or planners may be motivated to address challenges, their agency to do so is limited by existing legal and governance frameworks rooted in a legacy of top-down planning approaches. Planners perceived a lack of coordination and communication between government agencies at different scales as a key barrier for

operationalizing solutions. They highlighted that while several policies and master plans for urban development already exist, their success is hampered by a fragmented and secular approach to implementation: 'As we know that everybody's work is nobody's work. The 7th Five Year Plan has 12 ministries and 42 organizations for urban development. As there are so many agencies and organizations, there is a lack of coordination' (Policy Advisor, Dhaka Workshop). Examples of proposals put forward by planners are shown in Table 3 with most suggestions tempered by reflection on the constraints on agency and power at the city level (Figure 3).




#### 4. Discussion

The results of this study show that national level policies on urban development, on disasters and on long-term climate change are not well aligned to the reality of major migration flows to cities in Bangladesh. Where migration flows are recognized, in effect they are portrayed negatively, as a source of congestion and social incohesion, or alternatively as a source of labour for the development of expanding industries. Inevitably then, migrants face diverse sources of insecurity, extending beyond the material dimensions of their lives, as articulated in photographs and their narratives. The results of the action research show that bringing planners and migrant populations together leads to innovation in developing new and consensual elements of policies and

**Table 3.** Proposed solutions for addressing urban precarity suggested by city planners in Chattogram

Arenas for solution	Solutions proposed by city planners and policy stakeholders
Where migrants live Spatial distribution	'Many migrants live near the hills illegally. Some local leaders are illegally settling the migrants there. The migrants are paying money to live there. During the rainy season we have to evacuate these places. Otherwise the number of dead people from landslides increases'.
Housing and neighbourhoods	'We should also have a database about the migrants who are working here. On the basis of the employment of the migrants, we can provide an analysis about how many migrants are going to come here. In this way we can bring about their accommodation into policy making'.
Where migrants work Informal sector	'His livelihood is important but at the same time he is causing problem for the city dwellers. So, it would be good to set up hawker's market on the basis of local areas only for the hawkers'.
Formal sector	'I think the government must give training to these people in different fields. In this way they can get the jobs in the EPZs or in places other than this. I don't think they have good qualifications which they must also gather. They need to upgrade their training and qualifications. Capacity building is necessary'.
How the city works Infrastructure	'There are some other things that we need. Like where will our children go for recreation. I am talking about some open place like a park or something of that sort. People gather more in open places. People go there in plenty for amusement. Not just in Chittagong but in the whole country there is a lack of such amusement places'.
Practices and behaviors	'Another important problem for our city is that we have now sewerage system. So, the waste water spread various diseases like Cholera'.
Governance	'We should also follow law enforcement in this regard. If we can fine the people who throw waste here and there then the situation can be developed'.
	'We make a lot of policies and we also have master plans. But the problem is that we don't have the process or the procedure to go through that master plan'.
	'A single government organization cannot fulfill everything. All of them have to work together in a coordinated manner including the private sector'.

**Figure 3.** New policy opportunities and constraints for addressing urban precarity revealed in action research between planners and migrant populations in Chattogram

	Policy constraint	Policy opportunity
<b>Where migrants live</b>		
	Migrants are concentrated in hazard-prone informal settlements and at risk of exploitation by powerful actors who illegally capture government land. Planners lack sufficient data on how many migrants are arriving to cities, making planning and the provision of housing difficult.	Addressing corruption is key to curbing illegal land grabs. Providing integrated and subsidised housing for low-income groups could remove demand for informal unplanned settlements. A database of migrant numbers could inform planners and support the provision of adequate housing.
<b>Where migrants work</b>		
	Informal livelihoods such as street hawking, waste picking and garment scrap recycling pose a complex challenge for planners. Planners struggle to regulate working conditions and wages within informal industries, leaving many exposed to health and safety hazards and income fragility.	Providing education and upskilling for adult migrants would improve access to formal employment and enhance income security. Some groups will require additional measures (e.g. childcare for women with young families) in order to benefit from such initiatives.
<b>How the city works</b>		
	Due to shortcomings in urban governance, where different agencies fail to communicate, planners are unable to provide adequate and sustainable urban infrastructure to provide essential services or tackle major issues of road congestion and water logging.	Improved coordination and communication between different agencies could enhance the efficiency of service delivery. This could be coupled with awareness campaigns about the interaction between human practices and environmental hazards.

strategies to tackle where migrants live, where they work, and how the city works for them.

Research on precarity principally focuses on the insecurity of livelihoods and how globalized production and capital affect labour outcomes (Schierup and Jorgensen, 2016). Such studies argue that while, on the one hand, mobility and migration are encouraged, on the other hand, migrants are not provided with necessary citizenship rights and are rendered highly vulnerable to exploitation in urban destinations (Banki, 2013; Schierup et al., 2015; Schierup and Jorgensen, 2016). Thus, precarity is most often discussed along two dimensions: labour and citizenship. This study demonstrates wider concerns on security of place and identity. For example, migrants are vulnerable to exploitation through activities due to power asymmetries within their communities, absent social networks and support systems, and reduced access to essential services such as education or sanitation.

Unbalanced power dynamics between migrants and urban elites, as well as within migrant communities themselves, result in Chattogram, and in all rapidly growing cities of Bangladesh, in elevated exposure to environmental hazards and constrained access to civic facilities, bearing important implications for distributional justice (c.f. Banks, 2016). These findings affirm that a broader conceptualization of

precarity is necessary, one that recognizes non-economic dimensions and defines precarity more generally as synonymous with uncertainty and unpredictability (Ettlinger, 2007) entrenched in dominant structures of asymmetrical power.

The recognition that people experience insecurity in different areas of day-to-day life, such as gender or social relationships is well-established (Brah, 2002; Fantone, 2007; Rossiter and Neilson, 2005). Gendered experiences of precarity are revealed in the data here, where gender intersects with ethnic identity and religious affiliation and mediates migrants' scope and agency to take concerted actions towards addressing their own precarity. Alignment to dominant groups in terms of ethnicity, religion or language, does not guarantee superior coping ability, as demonstrated by the experiences of ethnic minority migrants. Therefore, this study resonates with findings on the diversity and heterogeneity of migrant experiences. Hence, the strategies deployed to counter precarity do not work equally well for all.

The multiple material and social dimensions of urban precarity revealed here are complex and intertwined. For example, insecurity in nutrition or education can be coupled with precarious employment and blamed on insufficient incomes. However, access to employment is mediated by the education level of migrants. While, the precarity of social

relationships is not necessarily conditioned by insecure work, however, strong social ties can facilitate access to employment and services. Strong social networks are particularly pertinent in situations where the urban poor fail to benefit from the majority of formal social safety nets (Banks, 2016; Banks et al., 2011). Cohesive social networks can alleviate material insecurity and empower migrants to demand improved citizenship rights (Banki, 2013). These findings call for a pluralistic interpretation of precarity which recognizes the reciprocity between material and social dimensions of life. Such conceptualization would promote the expansion of non-material aspects such as skills, education or social networks as an equally urgent policy priority.

The ability of migrants to participate in policy processes is key to overcoming precarity, yet often constrained by political exclusion due to lack of representation and weak citizenship rights in urban destinations. As a result, migrants are rendered invisible or become actively sidelined in policy decisions (Chu and Michael, 2019). The findings confirm that rural-urban migrants are indeed either overlooked or systematically problematized in relevant urbanization, climate change adaptation and disaster management policies of Bangladesh. Negative discourses about migrants as problematic intruders are deployed to justify exclusionary policies and inaction (Bhan, 2009; McGranahan et al., 2016). Similar trends in Bangladesh as well as in other contexts have been observed by others, who found that climate change policies make no explicit reference to the urban poor (Bankset al., 2011) or deploy resilience building strategies that favor the interest of elite groups (Chu and Michael, 2019).

While migrants are recognized by some Bangladeshi policies as essential resources for economic growth, most continue to view them as sources of poverty and precarity, instead of progress and innovation. This could be a missed opportunity for creating socially, economically and environmentally sustainable cities. The urban poor in general and migrants in particular are commended for their entrepreneurial nature, which has been linked to innovation and urban prosperity (Aerni, 2016; Banks et al., 2011). Banks et al. (2011), for instance, demonstrate that in the context of Bangladesh, the urban poor have been known for their resourcefulness, for instance by creating building designs that alleviate heat stress. Our study shows that migrants' ideas and intimate knowledge of precarious neighbourhoods can contribute to addressing urban problems, as evidenced by the solutions proposed by migrants during perspective-taking discussions with city planners of Chattogram. Therefore, Bangladeshi policies that perpetuate spatial, political and economic marginalization in urban spaces fail to capitalize on the potential of integrating migrants' perspectives into urban planning and policy. By systematically denying citizenship rights, political voice and recognition to this group, such policies further reinforce urban precarity and insecurity and fail to deliver on the aspirations of Agenda 2030.

It is clear that pervasive inequalities may well be amplified in deliberative democratic processes through asymmetrical power, dominant discourses and biases (Fraser, 1992;

Hendriks, 2009), therefore, decisions about design and choice of methods employed in deliberative democratic experiments are crucial for successfully mediating group social dynamics linked to asymmetrical power. Growing evidence shows that deliberative processes can promote enhanced understanding between actors in divided societies (Curato et al., 2017; Luskin et al., 2014). As the process embraces the pluralism of preferences, values and opinions, instead of aiming for consensus, it has the potential to build empathy, solidarity and understanding between stakeholders who unevenly share power (Dryzek and Niemeyer, 2006). The study here demonstrates the potential of participatory processes for facilitating meaningful deliberation between urban planners and migrants.

This study therefore suggests that engaging migrants, planners and policy stakeholders in deliberative democracy processes could be instrumental to overcoming the prevalent marginalization of migrant populations that bears implications for distributional and procedural justice. The action research experiment highlights that creating a safe space for deliberation between different actors can lead to eliciting solutions that integrate the lived experiences and perspectives of migrants. The case of Chattogram suggests that deliberative democracy can be successfully implemented in contexts wrought with high structural inequality and power asymmetry. Including previously excluded voices into policy processes through deliberation could, therefore, be key to improving the legitimacy and effectiveness of urban planning and policy actions, and contribute to the creation of safe, sustainable and inclusive cities.

## 5. Conclusion

This study reports on action research in Chattogram as an experiment in deliberative democracy. Findings from this process reveal that precarity is experienced by rural-urban migrants across multiple wellbeing dimensions, which extend beyond material condition and also include social relationships and practices, physical and mental health, dignity, education and nutrition. The review of existing urbanization, climate change adaptation and disaster and risk management policies in Bangladesh suggests that, at present, most policies are ill-equipped for addressing urban precarity either due to migrants' lack of political voice or due to policy discourses that frame migrants as problematic intruders and sources of problems. However, the action research reveals that engaging migrants, planners and policy stakeholders in deliberation and in taking each other's perspectives can assist in overcoming social and political marginalization, promote innovation and has the potential for integrating diverse perspectives and voices into policy decisions.

The implications of this study are that addressing the urban precarity of migrants will require a holistic view of precarity, which reaches beyond material notions of insecure labour or political issues of truncated citizenship, to include facets of life beyond employment and income, such as social relationships, education and health. At present, the

precarity of migrant populations is structurally reinforced by a lack of political voice that renders them invisible in policy, and by discourses that underlie exclusionary policies. This evident marginalization of rural-urban migrants, in turn, hampers urban sustainability.

Although this study is specific to the particular social, cultural and political context of Bangladesh, experiences of precarity by the urban poor and migrant populations, and processes of migrants' systematic exclusion from the policy arena, are common. The research reported here suggests that participatory deliberative processes can be scaled up and replicated in other urban settings across Bangladesh and beyond. The success of the multi-method participatory approach is evidenced by the positive feedback received from urban planners and migrants. On the one hand, migrants experienced greater visibility and exposure to policy stakeholders and discussions. On the other hand, urban planners reflected on the eye-opening nature of dialogue with migrants and demonstrated enthusiasm for integrating participatory processes of engagement with marginalized members of urban society into their own practice.

Migrants' ability to participate in policy processes is key to delivering legitimate and effective solutions that address existing urban challenges. Deliberative democratic processes present an opportunity for creating a safe platform for engaging migrants, policy makers and urban planners in a dialogue and for overcoming prevailing exclusionary practices. Integrating migrants' perspectives into planning and policy processes can, in turn, contribute to implementing safe, inclusive and sustainable cities for all.

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## Data availability statement

Interview and survey data used in this study are available through the UK Data Service. Photographic data obtained through photovoice is not available for sharing due to privacy and ethical restrictions.

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## APPENDIX

**Table A1.** Solutions to urban precarity proposed by migrants and planners

Solution	Proposed by	Security or wellbeing impact	Dimension of precarity addressed
Where migrants live Integrated/low-income/subsidized housing solutions	Migrants & planners	Physical health, Housing security Dignity, Food security, Physical and mental health Housing security, Financial security, Mental health	Illegal occupation of land and waterways Access to services  Cost and affordability of rents
Where migrants work Hawkers' market	Migrants & planners	Financial security	Fragile incomes, insecure and informal livelihoods
Capacity building: adult upskilling and education		Education, Financial security	Access to employment, fragile incomes, insecure livelihoods
Protect workers' rights and pay		Financial security, Mental health	Fragile income, lack of social security, Exploitation
Provision of protective clothing at work		Physical health and safety	Unhealthy and unsafe working conditions: injury, infections, disease
Childcare provision	Migrants	Education, Physical health and safety	Lack of education, exposure to health and safety hazards, child labour
How the city works Awareness campaigns on water logging, waste pollution, illegal occupation of land and waterways	Planners	Health and safety, Mental health, Housing security,	Waste pollution, water logging, eviction from hazard-prone illegal settlements
Enforcement of rules and regulations through financial incentives/penalties		Health and safety	Waste pollution, road congestion
Provision of public sanitation facilities		Health, Dignity	Access to services, hygiene and sanitation
Mass transportation		Health and safety	Road congestion, safe commute
Create pedestrian paths		Health and safety	Road congestion, safe commute
Improved waste management	Migrants	Health and safety	Waste pollution, health hazard, water logging
Curb corruption	Migrants & planners	Housing security, Financial security, Mental health, Physical health, Dignity, Nutrition	Illegal occupation of land and waterways, risk of eviction, exploitation, barrier to accessing services, bribery
Provide safe and/or open spaces for meeting, playing and socializing		Social wellbeing, Health and safety	Lack of school playgrounds, open/green spaces, social amenities and meeting places for children, youth and adults