

# Migration and Subjective Poverty Interactions: The Case of a Bangladeshi Village

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**Abstract:** This article attempts to examine the pre-and-post migration poverty and non-poverty status of returned migrants in a village of Bangladesh and underlines the factors that shape those statuses. It finds that out of forty-two migrants who returned mostly from Malaysia, twenty-two were poor before their migration, ten were from the lower middle class and the remaining ten were from middle class background. A substantial number of twenty-two poor migrants have been able to increase their household resources and have moved out from poverty. Furthermore, the majority of lower middle class and middle class migrants have plused extra resources with their pre-migration household resources and thereby have led an improved livelihood compared to that in their pre-migration period. The study also finds that upon returning home, a portion of migrant households from all classes has experienced a decrease in resources and is now living in a 'stressful economy'. In order to evaluate the impacts of migration and remittances on the poverty situation of returned migrants, and to find out the underlying factors behind this, the present study conducted a baseline survey on 371 households, collected personal narratives from all returned migrants and interviewed ten key informants through in-depth interview, as a qualitative data collection method. To analyze and interpret the information on subjective judgements of migrants on their pre-and-post migration periods 'narrative analysis' method is used throughout the article.

**Keywords:** Migration, Poverty, Remittances, Social Class, Subjective poverty.

## INTRODUCTION

Human beings' contemporary migration and its impact—positive and negative—on migrant-sending and migrant-receiving economies are universal. The factors that work behind migration processes are multifaceted in nature and thereby their impacts are similarly multifaceted. In order to explore macro-level economic and social impacts of migration some studies on migration [1-5] focus on migrants' host countries while the majority of migration studies [6-16] focus upon migrants' origin country. Those studies attempted to discover the multifarious developmental effects of migration not only on macro-economic sectors but also on micro economic and social sectors of migrants' households and the communities.

Poverty reduction and the reduction of its intensity are among the many positive developmental outcomes of migration that are analyzed by a significant number of researchers [17-25] across the world, who view migration as a potential means to reduce poverty incidence and its intensity because migrants form household resources and invest them in income-generating activities. At the same time, some researchers [26-30] regard migration as a means that adversely effects on poverty reduction because migration reduces migrants' household resources and thus they become poor from non-poor.

Remittance income has played an influential role to reduce poverty and its prevalence, and boosted the macro-and micro-economy in Bangladesh because Bangladesh has received more than USD210 billion as foreign remittance since 1976 from more than thirteen million migrants [31]. The average contribution of remittances to GDP during 1976 to 2018 period was 4.61 percent with a maximum of 10.59 percent in 2012 and 5.43 percent in 2019 [32]. A large

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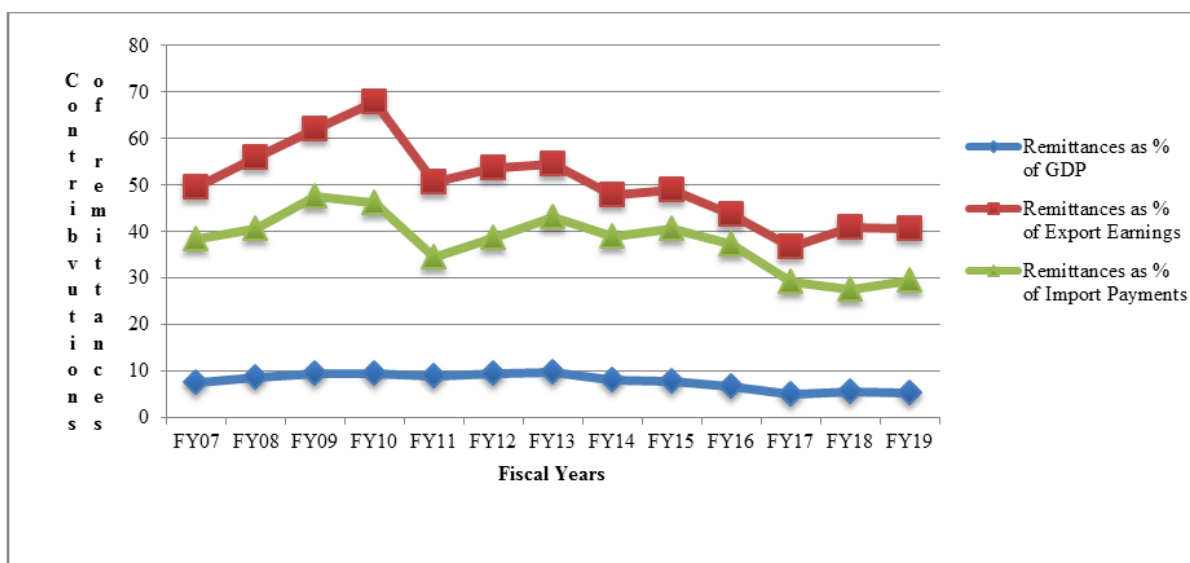
number of the researchers, who have investigated the role of remittances to poverty reduction, they have used panel data/secondary data, applied econometrics models/advanced quantitative research techniques, and concluded that remittances have, indeed, reduced poverty and its occurrences [33-37, 30, 38-40].

Despite its widespread application to measure poverty, econometric models are criticized by few researchers [41, 42] due to the limitations that they occasionally calculate inaccurate results. Again, these models are unable to explore and analyze the latent factors that influence poverty. These latent factors are significantly important to find out the real causes and consequences of poverty, and to formulate appropriate policy measures to reduce poverty. As an alternative of econometric models, subjective judgments of returned migrants can find out the latent factors of poverty that econometric models cannot do. It is equally, even sometimes more, effective to (than) econometric models because poverty is measured by this method through the judgements of the returned migrants themselves. A review of migration literature confirms that a group of researchers [43-46] analyzed subjective data on poverty but they applied econometric models to analyze and measure poverty. As poverty is defined subjectively on the basis of individual’s feeling regarding their poverty situations [47], it is logical to literally analyze the vignettes of migrants – what they truly perceive of their poverty. The analysis of the impacts of migration on poverty by this approach is overlooked and understudied in migration studies, especially in Bangladesh.

It is clear that the majority of local and international researchers have not only used subjective and objective data on poverty but also applied different econometric models to analyze those data. However, it is significantly important to subjectively analyze and measure poverty-related data collected through in-depth interview because it is the subjective perception of deprivation that clearly reveals people’s social and economic inequalities. In this respect, the migrants themselves, from a methodological point of view, are the best judges of their own situations [48, 44]. So, on the basis of this discussion, this article has attempted to examine the impacts of migration on poverty and non-poverty conditions of returned migrants’ [49] households. In doing so, this article uses primary data collected from a village, Lochangar, of Bangladesh.

**REMITTANCES AND POVERTY REDUCTION IN BANGLADESH**

After its independence in 1971, Bangladesh has achieved an impressive accomplishment in poverty reduction; but it still has a very large number of poor people. The present poverty rate identifies Bangladesh as one of the poorest countries in the world, next to the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa World Bank 2016 [51]. Amongst the poor, approximately eighty percent live in rural areas, and as there are few and dwindling livelihood options available in the rural sector, most rural poor opt to migrate either to urban areas in Bangladesh or abroad to survive [52]. Thus, Bangladesh has become the sixth largest migrant-sending countries in the world in 2019 [14] that sends a cumulative total of more than thirteen million Bangladeshis, thirteen percent of all population, and officially receives a remittance of approximately USD210 billion [31], as noted above. Many researchers [53-58] unearth that remittances significantly contribute to accelerate micro-and-macro-economic growth in Bangladesh. A part of macroeconomic contributions of remittances is presented in Figure-1 below, which illustrates that there has been a substantial role of remittance to export earnings, import payments and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) with a slight fluctuation.



**Fig-1: Contributions of remittances to macroeconomic sectors (FY 2007-19)**

Source: Government of Bangladesh (GoB), 2020 [32]

Some other macroeconomic effects of remittance that help in addressing the balance of payments, increasing foreign exchange reserves, enhancing national savings and velocity of money, and reducing the influence of development partners at policy level [59]. The contributions of remittances to macro-economy have simultaneously impacted on the reduction of poverty in Bangladesh. Public and private organizations have been taking different measures to reduce poverty over the last four and a half decades, and these have helped to reduce poverty from 72.0 percent in 1971 to 31.5 percent in 2010, 25.5 percent in 2014, and 21.8 percent in 2018 [52]. These statistics confirm that Bangladesh is one of the countries in the world that has achieved MDGs, particularly in the context of poverty reduction. Consequently, the World Bank has regarded Bangladesh as a model country for poverty reduction [60]. According to the 7th Five-Year Plan, the government of Bangladesh has targeted to reduce poverty rate to 18.6 percent by 2020 [52].

Overseas researchers have found that there has been a great role of remittances to reduce poverty in Bangladesh. Remittance may have reduced the number of poor people in Bangladesh by six percent [61]. Analyzing the Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) data of 2005, Raihan *et al.*, [33] found that the immediate impact of remittances on food and housing-related expenditure had a significant positive effect on poverty reduction. On average, remittance-recipient households were 5.9 percent more likely to be non-poor than non-remittance-recipient households [33]. Similarly, Ghelli [62] has suggested that non-migrant households living below the poverty line was twenty-seven percent higher than migrant households in 2013. Khan [63] has used the same data set that Raihan *et al.*, [33] used and has shown that remittance reduces poverty by approximately eighteen percent in Bangladesh.

A substantial number of Bangladeshi researchers [64, 37, 59, 65, 66, 38, 39, 40] have applied econometric models, as noted before, and examined a bi-directional causal relationship between remittance income and poverty reduction over the period of 1976-2019. The inflow of foreign remittance decreases the propensity of people to stay below the poverty line by 16.3 percent in rural area and by 11.4 percent in urban area [40]. A study conducted by Kumar [38] contends that 8.25 percent of remittance-recipient households and 39.53 percent remittance non-recipient households live under the poverty line. So, it can be easily concluded that remittance has a positive role in reducing poverty in Bangladesh.

Both local and international researchers, who have explored in examined the impacts of migration on poverty, have applied econometric models to compare between remittance-recipient households and non-remittance recipient households. Those researchers used three categories of data – first, economic data such as per capita income and per household income and expenditure; second, demographic data such as household head's age, sex, education, occupation, and number of household members; and third, data on household resources and access to services. Among the three sets of data, demographic data, as intervening variables, have the least significant impact on poverty reduction. However, most of the previous studies disregarded another important factor that significantly affects the nature and extent of poverty reduction in a community or country. This factor is the 'type of migrants' current, returned, or both.

This study endeavors to measure the impacts of migration and remittances on the nature and extent of poverty reduction in Bangladesh by using the method of subjective poverty. The uniqueness of this research is that it has considered three major important aspects that were overlooked in previous studies. These aspects are: first, this research uses primary data collected from the migrants who worked in Malaysia for four years on average, returned home and re-settled in the village; second, it focuses on the returned migrants' personal experiences and judgments of their poverty situations; third, it examines migrants' personal experiences and judgments of poverty conditions in light of pre-and-post migration contexts.

## METHODS AND DATA

In order to assess the perceptions of returned migrants' poverty states before and after migration, the study applied several methods and techniques to select appropriate study site and informants, and to ensure and gather quality data. The study team visited several villages in Natore District, in the western part of Bangladesh, in 2018 in order to select an appropriate village for fieldwork. Lochangar Village was finally selected for this study as it had some special characteristics such as a long history of migration, a required number of returned migrants, a changing pattern of village economy and it was located relatively close to the workstation of the study team. Some of these characteristics were absent in other visited villages.

As the contextual data was worthwhile to apprehend the analytical issue, the study tried to explore demographic, economic, natural and migration related information of Lochangar Village and thereby to understand the lives and livelihoods of the villagers, as will be explained later. In getting such information the study administered a baseline survey on all 371 households by using a structured questionnaire. Simple descriptive statistics such as graph and table are made to analyze poverty indicators-related data and social classes of returned migrants to better understand the assessments of returned migrants' perceptions about their pre-and-post migration poverty and non-poverty conditions.

With a view to better conceptualizing and collecting information on returned migrants' perceptions the study categorized the villagers into six different social classes through a Focus Group Discussion (FGD). The villagers categorized the households as the extreme poor (1.08 percent), the poor (33.42 percent), lower middle class (13.48 percent), middle class (45.55 percent), upper middle class (6.20 percent) and the rich (0.27 percent) in light of different social and economic indicators. For better analysis, first two categories of villagers are broadly grouped as poor (34.50 percent) while the last four categories are grouped as non-poor (65.50 percent).

In-depth interview, a data collection method, was applied to gather subjective perceptions of forty-two returned migrants' (out of seventy-two, thirty are current migrants) pre-and post- migration living standard. Subjective poverty is the people's overall subjective evaluation of their own financial situations (Butter 2013). A semi-structured interview schedule was used to gather information from all returned migrants, who were asked four primary research questions. The research questions were: i) what social class did you belong before your migration to overseas, and ii) why? iii) what social class do you belong after your return home, and iv) why?

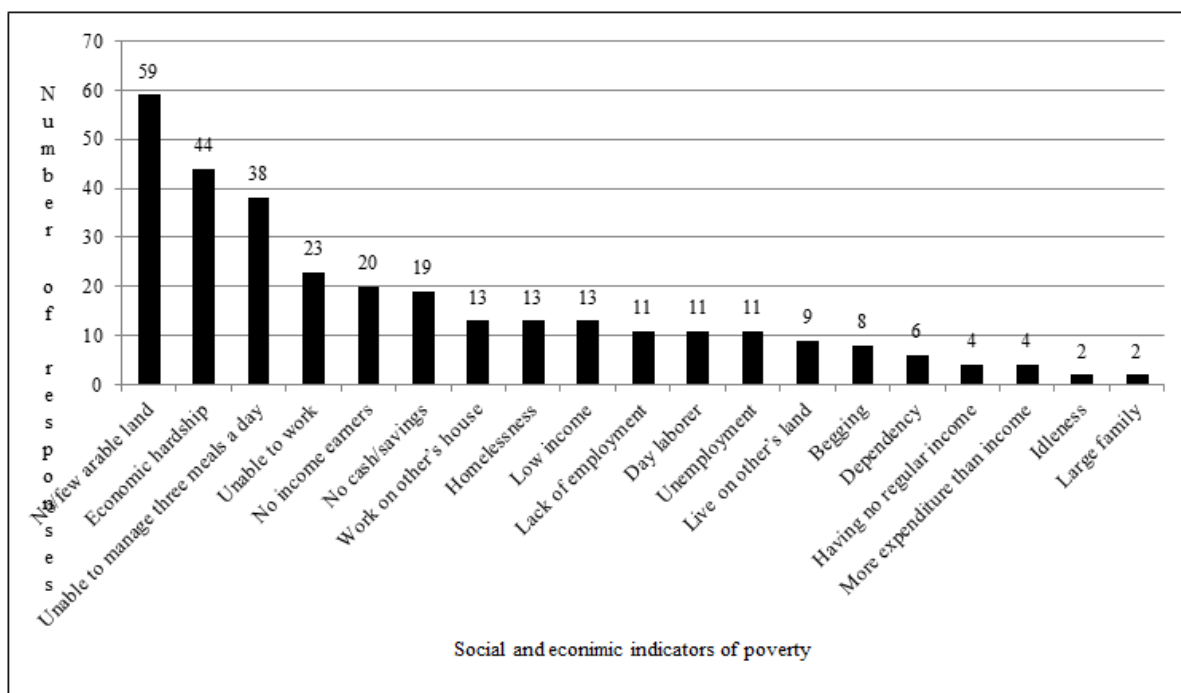
Returned migrants' subjective evaluations are analyzed through 'narrative analysis' a qualitative data analysis method. It treats stories as knowledge *per se* which constitutes 'the social reality of the narrator' [67] and conveys a sense of that person's experience in its depth, richness and texture, by which the actual words spoken. By using this tool returned migrants' vignettes or narratives on poverty evaluation are grouped in terms of their *content* that is literally illustrated through the use of 'I' form. In order to substantiate and justify the collected data on returned migrants and their households as well as to gather data on the changing trends of Lochangar Village economy, the study concurrently interviewed ten key informants by using a separate semi-structured interview schedule.

### **LOCHANGAR VILLAGE: THE CONTEXT**

Lochangar is a typical village in Bangladesh which is situated in Natore district, located some 160 kms to the West of Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh. It is three kms away from Natore-Rajshahi highway and forty-five kms from the divisional town, Rajshahi. The baseline survey reveals that a total of 1492 people live in 371 households, 4.02 members per household (mph) that is slightly less than the national average (4.06 mph) of Bangladesh [68]. The villagers are engaged in various income-earning activities in and around the village but agricultural activity is the main source of making a living because fifty-six percent (208) households are engaged in agriculture and the remaining forty-four percent (163) households are employed in commercial, technical and professional jobs in and nearby Lochangar village, and distant cities of Bangladesh.

Paddy is the main crop of villagers' livelihoods but few villagers grow sugarcane, jute, wheat, corn and lentils on a small amount of land. Climate change increases temperature which contributes to decrease rainfall and thereby decline the productivity of these crops. The farmers face difficulties to grow food when *Ishakha* River overflows and creates flood. Their agricultural activities are also hampered during drought. As a means of making money, the rich and the upper middle class villagers supply water to crop fields in drought season through deep tubewell in exchange of cash and/or crops from the farmers. Despite the initiatives, the farmers can not get returns from agriculture as they did before. All classes of households, particularly the extreme poor and the poor villagers are severely affected by these disasters. In response to these disasters, a number of public and private institutes help the poor and non-poor villagers but the initiatives are so insufficient that the poor cannot recover the losses and face extreme difficulties to survive while the non-poor villagers can somehow recover and survive as they have resources to do so.

Lochangar Villagers have articulated different social and economic indicators of poverty while categorizing them, as presented in Figure-2. The figure implies that the ownership of arable land is the most important indicator to identify the poor or rich villagers because the villagers regard a person who has no/few arable land as poor. Economic hardship is another most important indicator of poverty. Those who are unable to manage three meals a day are also considered as poor. It is not the case that a poor villager has one indicator of poverty rather, he/she has more than one indicators.



**Fig-2: Social and economic indicators of poverty in Lochangar Village**  
 Source: Fieldwork, 2018

It is obvious that the lives and livelihoods of Lochangar Villagers have rarely been improved enough to tackle any critical adversities by their own resources and also by the initiatives taken by the public and private organizations. In order to overcome the stressful social and economic life a person from this village first migrated to Malaysia in 1991 and following him many villagers have migrated to overseas, mostly to Malaysia. Since 2000 Lochangar Villagers' livelihoods, along with that in adjacent villages, have been significantly influenced by the introduction of PRAN Agro Farm Limited, one of the biggest national beverage companies in Bangladesh, in the locality. More than 8000 workers, mostly poor widowed and abandoned women, have been working in the company. The illiterate and unskilled women are engaged in cleaning jobs and others are involved in those jobs that are compatible with their qualifications and capabilities.

It is true that there was a significant role of the PRAN company in mobilizing the local economy. However, the poor people in the surrounding villages of the company have been unable to increase their household resources in real terms and to reduce poverty thereby. Similarly, the non-poor people were hardly able to increase their existing resources and standard of living. As no effort to enhance their lives and livelihoods, the inhabitants of Lochangar are now taking overseas migration as their alternative livelihood strategy. The baseline survey reports that seventy-two villagers have migrated to overseas since 1991 (forty-two villagers have returned home), mostly to Malaysia, of whom twenty-two poor villagers migrated to reduce their poverty conditions while the remaining twenty non-poor villagers migrated to improve their pre-migration standard of living.

**MIGRATION, REMITTANCES AND POVERTY NEXUS OF LOCHANGAR VILLAGE**

Migration plays a dual role by accumulating capital for some migrants who are fortunate and by lessening capital for others who are unfortunate. The migrants who have been able to invest remittances in the following three major productive to non-productive sectors, particularly at household level, have usually succeeded in upgrading their socioeconomic conditions. First, 'general consumption' of household goods and services such as food, clothes, housing, children's education and health [69-74]; second, 'conspicuous consumption' such as TV, refrigerator, motorbike, ornaments, etc [75, 64, 76]; and third, 'productive consumption' through investing in sectors such as land, livestock, business, bond and insurance, etc [70, 77-80].

**Table-1: Poor and non-poor status (social classes) of returned migrants (before-after migration)**

Social classes (numbers) before migration	Social classes (numbers & percentages) after migration			
Poor (22)	Extreme poor	9% (2)	Poor	32% (7)
	Poor	23% (5)		
	Lower middle class	18% (4)	Non-poor	68% (15)
	Middle class	45% (10)		
	Upper middle class	5% (1)		
	Rich	---		
Lower middle class (10)	Extreme poor	---	Poor	20% (2)
	Poor	20% (2)		
	Lower middle class	30% (3)	Non-poor	80% (8)
	Middle class	40% (4)		
	Upper middle class	10% (1)		
	Rich	---		
Middle class (10)	Extreme poor	---	Poor	10% (1)
	Poor	10% (1)		
	Lower middle class	30% (3)	Non-poor	90% (9)
	Middle class	---		
	Upper middle class	60% (6)		
	Rich	---		

Source: Fieldwork, 2018

On the other hand, the following three groups of migrants (or would-be migrants) were unable to change their fortune. First, those who spent money for migration but have failed to migrate; second, those who migrated to destination countries but returned home immediately after arrival for various reasons; and third, those who migrated but returned home without any successful gains. The resources these three groups of people had before their migration have been eroded, a fact that has forced them to live in a vulnerable situation. However, as illustrated in Table-1, the majority of the villagers who migrated from the poor, the lower middle class and the middle class households (No one from the extreme poor, upper middle class and rich class household has migrated) have been able to increase their pre-migration household assets. The personal narratives on forty-two returned migrants (poor and non-poor), indicate that migration is a double-edged sword that reduces poverty for some poor people while it increases poverty for others [81]. Table-1 also illustrates that migration has not impacted the livelihoods of twenty-three percent of poor and thirty percent of lower middle class migrants in Lochangar Village and thus they have remained at the same social strata where they were before their migration.

### REASONS OF MIGRATION, DYNAMICS OF REMITTANCES AND POVERTY REDUCTION: POOR MIGRANTS' PERCEPTIONS

There is a close association between the reasons of migration, the uses of remittances and the impacts of migration on migrants' households because one factor affects the other two. People from rural Bangladesh are compelled to leave their homes because of frequent natural disasters such as river-bank erosion, cyclones, droughts, floods and storms [82-84], and because of other reasons such as social insecurity, political violence and conflict [40]. However, the predominant reason of migration is poverty [8] because more than twenty-one percent people of Bangladesh still live under the poverty line [52]. Lochangar Villagers were primarily pushed by poverty to leave the village for searching better livelihoods. One of the Lochangar Villagers, Rashem [85] (a thirty-three-year-old, businessman) was unequivocally a poor who has stated his poverty condition before his migration:

"...I was forced to leave the village. I wasn't extreme poor because I'd some resources and I could work but I faced difficulties to earn the livelihoods of my family members." He further said, "How will I manage meals for them? How will I spend money for their education? How will I buy cloths? I couldn't manage three meals per day for the five-member family. Quality cloths! It was beyond my mind..."

Rashem feels himself as poor because he lacks resources to meet three basic needs such as education, food and cloths. Like Rashem, the rest of returned migrants with poor backgrounds migrated to Malaysia for searching almost the same basic requirements that Rashem cherished. The poor households were pushed to move out because of some dire factors such as landlessness, homelessness, economic hardship, debtness etc (see Table-1). As the poor lack resources, they manage migration costs from different sources, including financial support from their relatives and neighbors with or without interest. As Rashem says, "...I sold a piece of land worth BDT 50000 (USD 588) [86] and two livestock worth BDT 70000 (USD 824) and borrowed an interest free amount of BDT 150000 (USD 1764) from my relatives..."

Though Lochangar Village is relatively poor when compared with other traditional villages in Bangladesh, different categories of households have different type of resources to mobilize for migration. Field data reveal that financial support from relatives and neighbors is a major source for the poor that has contributed to forty-five percent migration costs, while nearly twenty-two percent migration money is arranged from land. Like the costs of migration, Rashem has clearly explained the returns that he has gained from migration.

“...I went to Malaysia through ‘calling visa [87]’ and worked there five years with some difficulties. I sent a total of BDT 560000 (USD 6588). I’ve bought the land that I sold for managing migration cost. I’ve paid BDT 150000 (USD 1764) that I borrowed from my relatives and neighbors. I’ve bought a cultivable land of twenty decimals. I’ve made a house for living. Now I’ve a small business in Madovpur bazar. The crops that I produce on land and the money that I can earn from business is enough for my family’s expenses. I don’t think that I’m a poor man in the village because I can now manage all basic needs such as education expenses, food, cloths and treatment that was quite impossible for me before my migration. I believe that I’m now a lower middle class household in the village because I’ve the resources that other lower middle class villagers have...”.

Rashem has confidently articulated that he has been able to elevate his social class from poor to non-poor because remittance has provided the capital for him to invest in agriculture-based livelihoods [79], also because land contributes to produce food and ensure food security. Remittance, similarly, enhances household social resilience by securing housing because housing as a basic need item provides better living conditions and protection from natural calamities [88-90] as well as improves the family’s social status in the community [79]. Additionally, the increasing of remittance inflows by one percent contribute to two percent rise in years of schooling of children at both secondary and tertiary levels [72]. The study conducted by Mannan and Farhana [73] is corroborated by the findings of this study because both these studies found similar impacts of remittances on food consumption, education, health care and local income generation.

It is obvious that remittance, through its role in increasing household resources and reducing poverty incidence, has become an important driver of social mobility [91]. Remittance constitutes fifty-five percent of migrants’ household income [92, 70] and twenty percent of migrant households have been able to raise their household income [14]. The study finds that sixty-eight percent of poor migrants have been able to increase their households’ resources and *move out* from poverty while fifty percent and sixty percent of lower middle class and middle class households, respectively, have increased their pre-migration household resources and are now enjoying a better living standard than they did in the past. Migrants with poor backgrounds do better than the wealthy migrants because the former group is dedicated to remit money while the latter group has a low incentive to remit and they forego relatively high domestic earnings [91].

Migration governance of Malaysia was another most important factor that determined the working and living conditions of migrants and affected their income. They have not contributed more to their households as they faced *ad hoc*, erratic and chaotic migration policies of Malaysia [93]. Rashem used ‘calling visa’ which is comparatively safer than other visas such as ‘tourist visa of Thailand’ and ‘tourist visa of Malaysia’ [54]. The survey explicates that the villagers who migrated first with these visas did not require trainings and work experiences; and even their human resources such as age, education and occupation rarely affected the securing of a decent job. This is because the majority of the migrants that Malaysia recruits from Bangladesh are primarily employed in agriculture and other sectors where unskilled migrants are required. However, the migrants who worked for a longer period understood Malay language, achieved working experience and got privileges to get a decent job and thus earned more money than the unskilled migrants did.

To sum, the returned migrants in Lochangar Village with poor economic background always felt ‘economic vulnerability’ [94] prior to their migration because they were incapable of managing basic needs for their family members. But after migration they are capable of increasing household resources investing in different income-generating activities, *moved out* from poverty and climbed up in social ladder [91]. On the other hand, the non-poor has similarly climbed up by increasing household resources and lived an *improved* livelihoods, also by upgrading household consumptions by more expensive and probably higher quality products [91]. Lochangar Village migrants are able to achieve capability to maintain livelihoods and they feel that they are now out of absolute deprivation in terms of their capabilities [95]. Thus, the current income of a significant number of returned migrants has worked as a ‘potential substitute’ for home income that tends to have an egalitarian effect on earnings [22] and thereby they lead a better standard of living.

### **Reasons of migration, dynamics of remittances and poverty increasing: non-poor migrants’ perceptions**

While many poor migrate to overseas in order to reduce their poverty conditions, a significant number of poor and non-poor villagers migrate to overseas to escape from natural disasters, and social and political conflicts, as noted

above. In addition to these, some people, particularly the non-poor migrates to *improve* their existing social and economic conditions. One of the non-poor villagers Wazed (a fifty-four-year-old, day labor) narrates:

“...I was never a poor man in the village. You could say I was a lower middle class in the village. ... I’d thirty-five decimals of arable land where I grew various crops all the year round. I mainly grew paddy and wheat. Sometimes I might grow seasonal vegetables. I’d a cow and a goat. I got milk from cow that I could sell in the local market and also met family demand. Somehow I could manage my five-member family. To make my family condition better, I took BDT 150000 (USD 1765) from a moneylender with ten percent interest, and sold my land worth BDT 170000 (USD 2000) and a cow worth BDT 60000 to arrange migration expenses...”

Wazed thinks himself as a lower middle class villager in Lochangar Village because he grew different types of crops on the land and got some money selling milk and thus maintained his family’s livelihoods. But he sold his only land for managing migration cost that he used to maintain his family. The economic costs of migration reduce regular family incomes and weaken the economic base of Wazed’s family because expenditure for migration is solely arranged by selling valuable resources of household such as arable land, livestock, crops and ornaments [96, 97]. Wazed’s family faces ‘economic stress’ for two reasons. First, there was no income in his family immediately after his migration as he was the only breadwinner. Second, he sold the land and the cow by which he met up his family’s requirements. Like Wazed, the majority of migrants with lower middle class background financed a considerable portion of migration cost through loans. However, only a small portion of middle class households took loan and they managed a major portion of migration costs from savings. As a result, the latter group of migrants has been able to increase household resources more than the former group has.

The migrants —poor and non-poor—of Lochangar Village who managed migration costs from loan with interests faced extreme difficulties during and after migration, and even after their home return. Migration literature confirms that the migrant households that have high level of outstanding debt, thirty-five percent of the debt is directly caused by the international migration [98]. It is because migration requires a substantial upfront investment that is managed by borrowing; and if the returns from migration are lower than expectation, the migrants need years to repay the debt [97, 99]; even they often take the entire migration period to service/repay the debt [100]. For this, remittance sent by migrants is not enough to offset their migration cost [101].

Additionally, migration governance of migration-origin and migration-destination countries substantially determines migrants’ vulnerable economic condition. More than ninety percent of migrants in Lochangar Village experience, more or less, a series of problems created by different public and private actors and agents at all phases of migration, from their preparation in Bangladesh to arrival and stay in Malaysia [54]. Wazed further narrates, “... One of my neighbours was a dalal (middleman) who sent me to Malaysia. He took all the money from me. I went to Malaysia and I found that all the documents were fake. It was in fact a tourist visa...” (entering Malaysia as ‘tourist’ legally without a job contract and obtaining a job locally through local level negotiation).

Being confronted with contract fraud is a common problem for migrants in Malaysia [102]. It is a common phenomenon that aspirant migrants are exploited and harassed financially and mentally both in Bangladesh and Malaysia. The promises that the middlemen do and the documents they provide to the migrants are far apart. Dubious documents are common. A group of middlemen from different levels constitute a syndicate [103, 104] and work together to make money from migrants providing them fake contract documents. In addition to the middlemen, a group of law enforcing and recruiting agencies and employers exploit migrants in Malaysia.

The entry arrangement with which Lochangar Village migrants migrate to Malaysia predominantly are organized by a syndicated network comprising of relatives and neighbors of the migrants, village-based middlemen, Dhaka-based middlemen, recruiting agencies, law enforcing agencies, Malaysia-based middlemen, and recruiters and employers, among others [54]. Wazed clears this issue, “...as it was a tourist visa, I couldn’t get job. After two months, I became undocumented. Like me, some other migrants fell in trap in Bangladesh by the middlemen. Some are trapped in Malaysia by a group of a middlemen, law enforcement agencies and employers. As it was the first time, I couldn’t understand the fraudulent activities of middlemen...”. Since the low-skilled and low-educated migration seekers are not aware of the detailed rules and procedures of migration and work in a foreign country, they are often exploited by middlemen at different phases; and as a result thirty-four percent of aspirant migrants’ attempts end up in failure [57].

In all situations, the quality of migration governance significantly influences the processes as well as the outcomes of migration. Middlemen or intermediaries, such as ‘scouting agents’, generate almost sixty percent of migration costs for Bangladeshi migrants, the highest in South Asia [14]. Transparency International of Bangladesh (TIB) reports that up to seventy-seven percent of migrants’ households experience corruption when they seek services from the government initiated welfare measures [105]. On the other hand, the migration policies of Malaysia, formulated



as an interim measure to tackle the unforeseen challenges of labor shortages, have failed to administer a strategic vision that is efficient, transparent, accountable and fair. For this, the efforts of the Malaysian government have been variously labeled as ‘fluid’, ‘unpredictable’, and possessing a ‘stop-go’ quality [106-108]. In these circumstances Wazed continues:

“I first started working in a furniture factory. I changed jobs several times within four years. Salaries were at subsistence level. I couldn’t send money home. I failed to earn a minimum income to pay the loan or to get back the land that I sold. But the amount of money that I was able to bring with me when I returned home was so insufficient that I just paid the loan. I couldn’t recover my land. So those who, like me, face various problems in Bangladesh and Malaysia become vulnerable to poverty. ...I wished to improve my social and economic conditions but I failed. My financial condition has worsened. Now I have no land, no money. How will I manage my family? I’m now old. I can’t work. My only son has dropped out from college and my daughter studies in grade eight. I have only two cows. It was my mistake to go to Malaysia...”

Wazed is not alone; our field data show that the household resources of twenty percent of lower middle class and ten percent of middle class migrants have decreased and they have become poor as depicted in Table-1 and they are living in ‘subjective economic stress’ [109]. This study also reveals that the household resources of nine percent of poor migrants have been reduced and thus they have fallen in extreme poverty situation. In all the cases of the poor and the non-poor migrants household resources as well as migration governance systems of Bangladesh and Malaysia have played a considerable role to determine migrants’ social and economic conditions. Therefore, the households that optimally or negatively adjust against household resources and remittance income, migration works as an adverse effect on poverty [110].

## CONCLUSIONS AND FACTORS TO RECONSIDER

The article attempted to measure the poverty and non-poverty statuses of Locghangar Village’s returned migrants in terms of their pre-and-post migration periods. In-depth interview method was used to collect the perceptions on migrants’ pre-and-post migration conditions and analyze the information through the use of ‘narrative analysis’ method. It is quite clear that migration, as a potential means, has enabled to increase the household resources of some migrants on the one hand and it has also decreased the household resources of some, on the other. Further, it is evident that a number of migrants with all classes have lingered the same social classes as they were before their migration.

The villagers who were poor before their migration the majority of them has *moved out* from poverty because they have been able to increase their household resources by buying arable land and livestock, building houses and investing remittances in income-generating activity such as business. The most important resource is arable land that they use all the year round to produce a variety of crops, especially paddy, jute and wheat. The produced crops have not only met the food items of family members they have also met the demand of non-food items such as education, treatment, accommodation and cloth. Like land, some poor migrants at the same time have invested remittances in business to fulfil households’ ends necessities. On the other hand, the villagers who were non-poor a significant number of them has been able to *improve* their pre-migration conditions because they have added extra resources with their pre-migration resources and thus they are now living an *improved* standard of living although they live as non-poor as before.

Furthermore, the poor villagers who migrated to *move out* from poverty a number of them has become extreme poor because the assets, particularly the land and the livestock that they had before their migration have been decreased upon return home. On the other hand, a group of non-poor villagers migrated to *improve* their pre-migration standard of living by increasing household resources. The resources such as land, livestock and ornaments that this type of migrant used as migration costs are exhausted. In addition to this, they have not received sufficient returns from migration. So, a group of poor and non-poor returned migrants are now living in ‘stressful economic condition’ who are living as ‘newly extreme poor’ and ‘newly poor’, respectively, in the village.

Migration’s impacts—positive and/or negative—on poverty and non-poverty conditions of returned migrants was determined by some factors ranging from migrants’ household level to destination country level. At the household level, the most important factor was the types and the amount of household resources that migrants used for managing migration costs and the amount of left behind resources when migration occurred. Loan with high interest was a troublesome burden for migrants because they had to pay the loan with interest. At the country level, migration governance of Bangladesh and Malaysia was substantially important because migrants’ preparation and journey as well as settlement and departure was strictly regulated by migration policies and laws of these two countries. In addition to these, it is equally important to consider migration duration as well as migrants’ origin country’s public and private facilities/incentives in order to accurately evaluate the impacts of migration on poor and non-poor situations of migrants and thereby to promulgate the stringent policy for the welfare of migrants and the country as a whole.

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87. Calling visa is a type of visa by which passengers travel by air direct to Malaysia with a job contract approved by the Malaysian government for a specific job. Additionally, Bangladeshis migrate to Malaysia through three major visas such as tourist visa of Thailand, tourist visa of Malaysia and free visa (see also Hossain 2017).
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49. Returned migrants are referred here to those migrants who went to Malaysia for laboring jobs, worked there around four years, returned home and re-settled in the village.
  50. Lochangar is a fictitious name of the study village.
  85. All the names of the respondents used in the whole article are fictitious.
  86. 1USD=BDT85 as of 10 February 2020.