

INTRODUCTION

As Bangladesh stands at the threshold of achieving middle-income status in 2026, climate change threatens to unravel its remarkable progress from one of the poorest countries in the world at independence in 1971, to one where poverty levels [declined](#) to 5% by 2022.¹ A substantial portion of the national budget is already being diverted from development investments to climate change. The Ministry of Finance [estimates](#) that 8.99% of the budget of 25 key ministries was spent on climate change in 2023-2024, with the biggest diversions from food security, social protection and health, and infrastructure.²

Despite progress on most development indicators, Bangladesh has struggled to address inequality, which has only slightly narrowed in rural areas and widened in urban areas in recent years. Climate change is a critical factor in the widening of this gap, as sudden and slow-onset climate impacts push households back or further into poverty through loss and damage to critical assets, and hinder access to health, education and economic opportunities. According to analysis by the Global Center on Adaptation (GCA):

- 75% of the households in coastal Bangladesh are at risk from climate-related hazards – particularly low-income communities, which are typically worst affected by cyclones and coastal flooding.
- Extreme climate hazards (including coastal and riverine floods and cyclonic winds) could impact 95% of the country's healthcare facilities, 70% of cyclone shelters, 93% of market centres, and 95% of education facilities by 2050.
- Total economic damage due to riverine and coastal flooding in Bangladesh can reach €12.7 billion (3.05% of GDP) by 2050 for the transport sector alone, affecting 20.5% of the national population (~33 million people). Of this 20.5%, 50.4% are women, who could lose access to education and healthcare facilities.
- Coastal flooding is expected to cause €25.72 million in damage to education facilities by 2050. Riverine flooding will affect the access of almost 80% of population to education facilities.
- Climate-related damage to infrastructure will limit the country's progress towards achieving the SDGs. Particularly in coastal areas, SDG 4 (Education) progress is limited by an average of 15% due to disruption to access to education facilities and SDG 8 (Employment) by an average of 10% due to disruption to access to market centers.
- Climatic shocks are forcing children to end their education due to migration to urban slums after climate disasters, where they are forced to resort to labor.

Catastrophic weather events are speeding up the flow of migrants into urban centers. In 2019, 4.1 million people (2.5% of the population) were displaced because of climate-induced disasters in the country.³ By 2050, the World Bank predicts that the country will have 19.9 million internal climate refugees – almost half the projected number for the entire south Asia region.⁴ In general, coastal areas are already experiencing dampened growth due to out migration, as sea-level rise and storm surges make them less livable.⁵

Most migrants go to Dhaka, making it one of the fastest growing megacities in the world, with a population of over 22 million in 2022. As a result, the capital city is dangerously overcrowded, and over a third of the population live in informal settlements. The constant inflow of migrants puts increased pressure on

¹ Based on the international poverty line of \$2.15 a day.

² Ministry of Finance (2023). *Climate Financing for Sustainable Development: Budget Report 2023-24*. https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/page/6e496a5b_f5c1_447b_bbb4_257a2d8a97a1/Climate%20English.pdf

³ BRAC (2022). *Rethinking Shelter: Bangladesh's new approach to protecting lives and livelihoods*

⁴ World Bank (2022). *County Climate and Development Report for Bangladesh*. World Bank Group, Washington, DC. <http://hdl.handle.net/10986/38181>

⁵ Anon (2021). Climate Impact on Country's Coastal Region: 13.5 million at risk of displacement by 2050. *The Daily Star*.

already limited public services available in Dhaka, compromising the long-term physical and mental well-being of its citizens.

There is therefore increased focus on limiting the pressures of migration on Dhaka by making secondary cities more attractive to migrants and preparing them to benefit from the influx of potential labor and expanding their capacity to provide public services to the increasing population. The coastal municipality of Mongla is one such secondary city.



ABOUT MONGLA PORT MUNICIPALITY

Mongla lies at the confluence of the Pashur and Mongla Rivers, along the vulnerable south-west coast of the country. The current population of Mongla Municipality is approximately 42,000 residents, spread across nine wards, already contends with the challenges of sea-level rise, water salinity, cyclones, storm surges, and land and riverbank erosion, which drive water and food insecurity, loss of livelihoods, compromised physical and mental health and well-being, damage to infrastructure, and further displacement.⁶ The population density in the municipality jumped from 62.04 in 2001 to 79.3 per acre in 2021. It is expected to hit 87.7 per acre in 2031, when the population doubles to 80,190.⁷ Unless this

⁶ Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (2015). *Bangladesh Population and Housing Census 2011*; and Roy, B., Penha-Lopes, G., Uddin, M. A., Kabir, M. H., Lourenço, T. C., & Torrejano, A. (2022). Sea level rise induced impacts on coastal areas of Bangladesh and local-led community-based adaptation. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*; Elsevier, Vol. 73.

⁷ Khulna Development Authority (2011). *Preparation of Structure Plan, Master Plan and Detailed Area Plan for the Extension of the Khulna Master Plan Area up to Mongla Town*.

growth is inclusive and carefully planned, informal settlements will continue to proliferate, increasing climate vulnerability.

ECONOMIC PROSPECTS OF MONGLA

The backbone of Mongla's economy is its seaport. Established in 1950 as Chalna Port, it is the gateway for the country's exports of seafood, ready-made garments and jute, and imports of fertilizer, raw materials for the cement industry, coal and automobiles.

Mongla is a category A municipality, generating a revenue of BDT 8 million (approximately US\$ 66,000) per annum. Although the port's income has grown exponentially, from US\$ 5.3 million in 2010, to US\$ 25 million in 2022.⁸ It has considerable potential for further economic growth due to its proximity to the urban centers of Khulna and Dhaka, the inauguration of the Padma Bridge in 2022, connecting Mongla to Dhaka and other parts of the country, and plans for the Asian Highway 1, which is expected to connect the port to markets in countries such as India and Myanmar. A railway line connecting Mongla to the district capital of Khula, soft launched in November 2024, will further improve the port's connectivity, along with the revitalization of an existing inland river transport route after the Highway is operational.⁹

These developments have also supported the growth of Mongla's Export Processing Zone (EPZ), which was launched in 2001 and offers the advantage of lower land prices than other EPZs in Dhaka and Chattogram. The Zone hosts 32 factories employing 8,165 workers, with eight more factories under construction. Investments in the EPZ grew from US\$ 5.14 million in 2010/2011 to US\$ 97 million in 2021, while exports grew from US\$ 74 million in 2011 to US\$ 718 million in 2021.¹⁰ Mongla also hosts four cement factories, three Liquefied Petroleum Gas factories, eight rice mills, six rice husking mills, and two flour mills that create employment opportunities.¹¹

Attracted by these economic prospects, hundreds of migrants escaping the impacts of disasters, water salinity and economic distress along Bangladesh's vulnerable coastline arrive in Mongla each day. However, despite the economic growth and opportunities, wages are low, with most households earning less than BDT 50,000 (approximately US\$ 400) per month. Unplanned migration has led to a proliferation of densely packed informal settlements that are very vulnerable to climate change due to their fragile locations (especially prone to flooding), and lack of access to public services and risk-reducing infrastructure.

⁸ Mongla Port Authority (2022). *Yearly Report 2021-22*.

⁹ Amin, S., Sharif, S., & Khan, M. S. (2014). *The Revitalization of the Second Largest Seaport in Bangladesh - A Dry Port Concept*. TRANSLOG 2014 Conference, Burlington, Ontario.

¹⁰ Parvez, S. (2022). Mongla EPZ finally begins to buzz. *The Daily Star*.
<https://www.thedailystar.net/business/economy/news/mongla-epz-finally-begins-buzz-2985521>

¹¹ BBS (2011). *Population and Housing Census 2011*. Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.
https://bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/7b7b171a_731a_4854_8e0a_f8f7dede4a4a/PHC2011PreliminaryReport.pdf