

19 January 2015

## BANGLADESH

# Comprehensive response required to complex displacement crisis

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, millions of people were forced to flee their homes in what is now Bangladesh. They were displaced both within the territory and to neighbouring areas by different triggers. As of January 2015, IDMC estimates that at least 431,000 people were displaced in the country as a result of conflict and violence. Information on their number and situation is limited, contested and outdated, however, with little known about the scale of new displacement in 2014.



House set on fire during inter-communal violence in August 2013 near Taindong Bazar of Matiranga Upazila in Khagrachari District. Its *Pahari* inhabitants were among those forced to flee. Photo: (c) Mita Nahar, August 2013

Bangladesh is also highly prone to natural hazards, mainly cyclones and floods, and hundreds

of thousands of people are displaced each year by the disasters they cause. In 2013, more than 1.1 million fled cyclone Mahasen. More than 325,000 were newly displaced by flooding in 2014.

Over the last three years, inter-communal violence targeting indigenous, Hindu and Buddhist communities has caused new displacement. The establishment of development projects has also forced large numbers of people to flee, including in areas experiencing displacement as a result of conflict and violence.

Most of those displaced by conflict and violence live in protracted displacement. They include about 280,000 people displaced in the south-eastern Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) region by armed conflict and inter-communal violence since 1973; and more than 151,000 Urdu speakers displaced in Dhaka and other urban areas in 1971. Current estimates are significantly lower than the number originally displaced, which in CHT stood at 667,000 in 2000. For the displaced Urdu speakers it was several hundred thousand in 1972.

Obstacles to durable solutions include failure to fully implement the 1997 CHT peace accord, discrimination in terms of access to services and civil documentation and recurring inter-communal violence. Bangladesh has no national policy or legislation on IDPs, and the government has no overall plan to respond to the needs of different groups and situations. Instead national and local authorities' responses tend to be piecemeal and rarely based on an analysis of IDPs' needs. These shortcomings, and the fact that most people displaced by conflict and violence are from marginalised minority groups, have contributed to prolonging their displacement. International organisations provide development assistance, but do not specifically focus on conflict IDPs.



The response to displacement caused by disasters, which government entities, NGOs and regional and international organisations participate in, tends to be better, but here too a comprehensive strategy is lacking, particularly regarding the prevention of displacement.

The first step in effectively addressing IDPs' needs is for the government to systematically collect data on their number and situation. It could do so by carrying out or supporting a profiling exercise. Such research would also help to identify the obstacles that prevent IDPs from achieving durable solutions, and to devise action plans in response. The government further needs to make every effort to ensure that development projects do not cause displacement, and to provide adequate compensation to those affected when it cannot be avoided, in line with international standards including the basic principles and guidelines on development-based evictions and displacement.

## Background

Millions of people were displaced in what is now Bangladesh during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, both within the territory and to neighbouring areas that today are part of India, Pakistan and Myanmar. Partition in 1947, Bangladesh's war of independence in 1971 and internal armed conflict in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) from 1973 to 1997 were significant drivers. Others fled inter-communal violence or disasters brought on by natural hazards, or were forcibly evicted to make room for development projects.

With independence in 1947, the former colony of British India was partitioned into Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan. The territory that is now Bangladesh became East Pakistan. Large numbers of people were killed in inter-communal violence, and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) estimates that 14 million people moved across the new borders to join those

who shared their faith ([UNHCR](#), 1 January 2000, p.59; [van Schendel](#), 2009, pp.96-103). A fifth of East Pakistan's non-Muslim population stayed put, however, including millions of Hindus and several hundred thousand indigenous people of Buddhist, Christian, Hindu or animist faiths, concentrated in CHT in the south-east and in northern parts of the country ([van Schendel](#), 2009, pp.100-101, 107).

In 1971, Pakistan's armed forces attacked East Bengali nationalists. The ensuing war led to Bangladesh's independence. During the nine-month conflict and its aftermath, the Pakistani military and associated armed groups perpetrated large-scale violence against the Bengali population, which responded with revenge attacks against those supporting - or perceived to be supporting - the aggressors ([van Schendel](#), 2009, p.173). Estimates of the death toll range from 1.7 to three million, twenty million became internally displaced and 10 million crossed the border into India ([Dawson and Farber](#), July 2012, p.38; [Kelley](#), 2009, p.5). The new state was founded with a Bengali Muslim identity, and neglected and marginalised those who did not share it, including indigenous groups in CHT and other parts of the country, Bengali Hindus and non-Bengali Muslims ([van Schendel](#), 2009, p.185-186).

Bangladesh's parliamentary democracy came to an end in 1975 with three coups, after which military dictators governed the country from 1975 to 1990. Since then, with the exception of a military-backed caretaker government from 2007 to 2008, civilian rule has alternated between the Bangladesh Awami League under Sheikh Hasina and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party under Khaleda Zia ([van Schendel](#), 2009, p.200). Hasina began her third term as prime minister in January 2014 following elections that were boycotted by most opposition parties and were said to be among the most violent in the country's history ([Guardian](#), 6 January 2014).

Bangladesh is home to 158.5 million people ([UNFPA](#), 18 November 2014, p.110). It is the world's eighth-most populous country with 1,203 people per km<sup>2</sup>, compared with an average of 450 in south Asia and 55 worldwide ([World Bank](#), last checked 26 November 2014). As of 2007, 84 per cent of its urban population was living in slums ([IRIN](#), September 2007, p.41). It currently ranks 142nd out of 186 countries on the UN Development Programme (UNDP)'s human development index ([UNDP](#), 24 July 2014).

The capital, Dhaka, is the world's most densely populated city with 45,000 people per km<sup>2</sup> ([RISE](#), 9 March 2013). It is also one of the fastest-growing. Its population more than doubled between 1990 and 2011, from six to 14.5 million inhabitants. Its slums are expanding particularly fast, with most of the estimated 300,000 people who move to the city each year being poor migrants looking for employment ([van Schendel](#), 2009, p.232; [City Population](#), 25 July 2012).

Bangladesh is prone to disasters brought on by natural hazards, including cyclones, tornadoes, storm surges, floods, drought, earthquakes, river-bank erosion and landslides ([RRCAP](#), 2001, p.93). The majority of the country is made up of low-lying floodplains, and there are more than 230 waterways including the Jamuna, the Padma and the Meghna, which bring water from the Himalayas in the north to the Bay of Bengal in the south ([India Quarterly](#), 2012, p.31; [ADB](#), March 2013, p.31).

Natural hazards have become more frequent and severe over the last decades as a result of climate change, and global warming of 2C is expected to make Bangladesh an "impact hotspot", with the projected rise in the sea level threatening major urban areas, infrastructure, livelihoods, food production and access to drinking water ([World Bank](#), 19 June 2013, pp.xxiii, 122, 123, 129). This exposure, combined with the country's political and socio-economic challenges, makes it highly vulnerable to disasters and the longer-term ef-

fects of climate change, including displacement ([RRCAP](#), 2001, p.93).

Bangladesh currently hosts more than 230,000 stateless Rohingya refugees from Myanmar's Rakhine state. The government has registered more than 30,000 ([UNHCR](#), 28 January 2013).

## Causes of displacement

Armed conflict led to internal displacement in 1971 and from 1973 to 1997. Since then, inter-communal violence and development projects have continued to cause small and medium-scale displacements. Rapid-onset disasters exacerbated by climate change displace hundreds of thousands of people each year. Cyclone Mahasen forced more than a million to flee their homes in 2013.

### *Chittagong Hill Tracts*

CHT has suffered displacement as a result of forced evictions associated with development projects since the 1960s, and armed conflict and inter-communal violence since the 1970s, with the causes interlinked and mutually reinforcing. The landlocked region is made up of the Khagrachari, Rangamati and Bandarban districts, and is home to 11 minority *adibashi* or indigenous groups. The Bawm, Chak, Chakma, Khumi, Khyang, Lushai, Marma, Mro, Pangkhua, Tanchangya and Tripura collectively identify as *Pahari*, Bangla for "hill people", or *Jumma*, a term that refers to their practice of *jhum* or slash-and-burn agriculture. They currently make up 53 per cent of CHT's population of 1.6 million people ([ECOSOC](#), 18 February 2011, p.3; [ECOSOC](#), 27 February 2014, p.5).

In 1961, construction of the Kaptai dam across the Karnaphuli river in Rangamati district was completed with the support of western donors, to generate electricity and drive development in what was then East Pakistan. A third of CHT's *Pahari* population, or 100,000 people, were forced



to leave their homes, because their villages – along with 40 per cent of the region’s arable land and the palace of the Chakma *raja* or ruler – were flooded by the dam’s reservoir. Tens of thousands of people fled to India and Myanmar. The remainder settled in other parts of CHT ([van Schendel](#), 2009, pp.126, 149-150). The authorities did not consult those to be affected, and those who suffered losses received practically no compensation ([van Schendel](#), 2009, pp.149-150), making this displacement an example of large-scale forced eviction.

Matters did not improve after Bangladesh’s independence in 1971, or after it acceded to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 1998. This despite the fact that the reservoir deprived those displaced of their means of subsistence in violation of article 1(2). Neither did CHT benefit from the electricity produced by the dam, and the grievances it created likely contributed to the outbreak of internal armed conflict in the region ([Ahmed](#), 1998, p.231; [van Schendel](#), 2009, pp.149-150; [ECOSOC](#), 27 February 2014, p.6).

The 1971 to 1975 civilian government rejected *Pahari* representatives’ peaceful demands for CHT’s autonomy, and in 1972 *Pahari* leaders founded the United People’s Party of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (*Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti*, PCJSS). The party set up a military wing, *Shanti Bahini*, or the Peace Force, the following year. Its armed conflict against the state intensified once the country came under military dictatorship in 1975 ([Adnan](#), 2004, p.27; [van Schendel](#), 2009, pp.212-213).

Between 1979 and 1984 the government supported the settlement in CHT of 400,000 landless Bengalis from other areas of Bangladesh, mostly those affected by river erosion, as part of its counterinsurgency campaign. The settlers were provided land that was under common or private *Pahari* ownership, reinforcing a process of demographic

change already underway ([ECOSOC](#), 18 February 2011, p.4; [Adnan](#), May 2011, p.42; [Leckie](#), 2014, p.203). The *Pahari* proportion of CHT’s population dropped from 91 per cent in 1951 to 53 in 2011 ([Adnan](#), May 2011, pp.41-42; [ECOSOC](#), 18 February 2011, p.4; [ECOSOC](#), 27 February 2014, p.5; [Leckie](#), 2014, p.210).

Indigenous people were forcibly relocated to “model villages” and as such arbitrarily displaced. Bengali settlers occupied the land they left behind. The ensuing inter-communal violence and continued armed conflict led to further *Pahari* displacement. Some settlers were also forced to flee their new homes for “cluster villages” under military protection ([ECOSOC](#), 18 February 2011, pp.4-5; [ECOSOC](#), 27 February 2014, p.5).

In 1997 Hasina’s first government and PCJSS signed a peace accord, but the following year PCJSS split and those who felt the agreement failed to grant CHT enough autonomy founded a new party, the United People’s Democratic Front (*GoB and PCJSS*, 2 December 1997; [van Schendel](#), 2009, p.213). There have since been a number of violent clashes between the two parties, most recently in Rangamati district in June 2014 and Khagrachari district the following month ([BSS](#), 12 June 2014; [The Daily Bangladesh](#), 18 July 2014).

Displacement associated with inter-communal violence and development projects has continued ([AI](#), 12 June 2013, pp.19-25). On 16 December 2014, the 43rd anniversary of Bangladesh’s independence, tensions between Bengali settlers and *Pahari* over land ownership in CHT’s Rangamati district turned violent. A Buddhist temple was vandalised and more than 50 indigenous homes burned down, forcing their inhabitants to flee into the forest ([Dhaka Tribune](#), 20 December 2014; [CHTC](#), 18 December 2014).

According to section B article 26 of the 1997 accord, no settlement or transfer of CHT land can be carried out without the approval of the regional

council, with the exception of specified areas including forest reserves, the Kaptai hydroelectric project, state-owned factories and land registered to the government ([GoB and PCJSS](#), 2 December 1997). In practice, however, the government has bypassed the council by acquiring land for commercial production and military installations under the 1900 CHT Regulation ([NHRC](#), October 2014, pp.43-44; [Dhaka Tribune](#), 10 August 2014; [Daily Star](#), 17 July 2014; [Dhaka Tribune](#), 15 July 2014; [Dhaka Tribune](#), 1 July 2014).

*Pahari* have been forcibly evicted and have not received adequate compensation, and those affected include families already displaced earlier. Since 1997, 156 *Pahari* families have been forcibly evicted from their land to make way for Bengali settlers and agricultural projects ([Daily Star](#), 18 October 2014). In March and April 2013, *Pahari* left their village in Bandarban district after armed men attacked them, looting and destroying their houses and injuring some. The attack was intended to force the villagers to move out in order to make space for rubber plantations ([Gain](#), 2013, p.82). In May 2014, 21 *Pahari* families were forcibly evicted from their homes in Khagrachari district to make way for a Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) battalion headquarters. One of the families was first displaced in the early 1960s because the creation of the Kaptai dam reservoir flooded their home in Rangamati district. The armed conflict later forced them to flee to India, and they returned to Khagrachari after 1997 ([Daily Star](#), 14 July 2014).

*Pahari* livelihoods, identity and culture in CHT are closely linked to their ancestral land, on which they practise slash-and-burn agriculture managed under communal and customary ownership ([ECOSOC](#), 27 February 2014, p.5). The growing influx of non-*Pahari* people since the 1950s and the large-scale loss of land and displacement caused by the filling of the Kaptai dam reservoir in 1962 have threatened the *Pahari* way of life and helped to drive the armed conflict. Those affected have

not been adequately compensated for their losses ([AI](#), 12 June 2013, pp.41-42).

This violates article 12 of the International Labour Organisation (ILO)'s Convention on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (no. 107), which covers the prevention of displacement and the provision of adequate compensation; the ninth Guiding Principle, which places "particular obligation" on states to prevent the displacement of groups "with a special dependency on and attachment to their lands"; and the second Pinheiro Principle, which covers restitution of land and property and adequate compensation.

Under Bangladeshi law, land not secured with a formal title is assumed to belong to the state, which exposes customary owners to dispossession because authorities are free to reallocate their land ([Adnan](#), May 2011, pp.41-43). The allocation of displaced *Pahari* land to Bengali settlers in CHT not only violates indigenous people's rights, but also constitutes a serious obstacle to return.

Reports by NGOs and media suggest that rape is also a driver of displacement in CHT, perpetrated by Bengali settlers to scare indigenous women off their land ([Kapaeng Foundation](#), 26 February 2014; [Daily Star](#), 28 July 2014). The number of people to have fled as a result is, however, unknown.

#### *Urdu-speaking people*

During partition in 1947, non-Bengali Urdu-speaking Muslims, also known as *Biharis* or "stranded Pakistanis", moved from Bihar and elsewhere in India to take up permanent residence in East Pakistan. The Pakistani government made Urdu the national language and gave preference to Urdu-speakers over their Bengali counterparts in terms of access to land, property and public sector employment ([RSQ](#), 2006, p.59; [IRIN](#), 27 August 2013).

Many *Biharis* were opposed to Bangladesh's independence and some joined armed groups that

fought alongside the Pakistani military during the 1971 war. In its aftermath the vast majority were forced to flee their homes in Dhaka, Rajshahi, Chittagong and Khulna divisions. The newly established Bangladeshi government subsequently confiscated their land and property. Numbers are disputed, but hundreds of thousands and potentially more than a million people moved into nearby camps set up by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) ([Redclift](#), 2010, pp.3-4; [van Schendel](#), 2009, p.173; [UNHCR](#), December 2009, p.1; [Kelley](#), 2009, p.7; [RSQ](#), 2006, pp.54-55).

Unknown numbers were later registered as Bangladeshi citizens and managed to integrate, but 530,000 said they would prefer “repatriation” to Pakistan. Between 1973 and 1993, however, only 180,000 were officially repatriated, and as many as 100,000 moved under their own steam. Today there are as many as 300,000 Urdu speakers in Bangladesh, around half of them still living in the same camps, which have evolved into slum-like settlements ([Redclift](#), June 2013, p.24; [IRIN](#), 27 August 2013; [Kelley](#), 2009, pp.8 and 10; [UNHCR](#), December 2009, pp.1-2; [RSQ](#), 2006, p.55).

#### *Hindus and Buddhists*

In addition to *Pahari* and Urdu speakers, members of the Hindu and Buddhist minorities have been displaced by violence on the basis of their ethnicity or religion. This violates article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which Bangladesh acceded to in 2000, and the 1992 UN Minorities Declaration.

During the 1965 war between Pakistan and India, an estimated 600,000 Hindus fled from East Pakistan to India, and the Pakistani government confiscated their property under the Enemy Property Act. After independence, the Bangladeshi government retained the same provisions in the form of the 1974 Vested Property Act, and used them to confiscate the property of around a million Hindu families, displacing them in the process. In 2001 and 2011, legislation de-

signed to remedy their situation was introduced ([Jalais](#), 2010, p.165; [SAHR](#), 2013, p.52; [BBC](#), 28 November 2011).

Hindus and Buddhists were the targets of inter-communal violence a number of times in 2012. Homes were looted and burned down in various parts of the country, sexual violence was perpetrated against women and several hundred people were displaced. There were allegations implicating local politicians in the violence and the police were accused of failing to protect those affected ([GHRD](#), April 2013, pp.3-5). How many continue to live as IDPs is unknown.

In 2013, the vice president of the Jamaat-e-Islami party, Delwar Hossain Sayedee, was sentenced to death for involvement in war crimes during the 1971 war, a development that prompted Islamist extremists to attack Hindu communities. They destroyed more than 1,500 homes, temples and shops, and an unknown number of people were displaced ([BBC](#), 9 March 2013).

During the 2014 elections, armed gangs attacked Hindus and indigenous people in several districts, allegedly with the aim of forcing them to leave their homes and occupying their property. Five thousand families were reportedly affected, with 600 individuals forced to flee in Jessore and 1,200 in Thakurgaon district. The overall number of people displaced is unknown ([IRIN](#), 31 January 2014; [Daily Star](#), 6 January 2014; [Daily Star](#), 7 January 2014).

#### *Disasters and climate change*

As a result of climate change, increasing quantities of meltwater and sediment have been washed down from the Himalayas and the monsoon season has become longer ([IRIN](#), 25 June 2008). The sea level has also risen, and a projected rise of at least 80cm is predicted to displace up to 30 million people by 2100 ([SAHR](#), 2013, p.38; [IPS](#), 29 October 2014; [Leckie](#), July 2014, p.7). Flooding and associated riverbank erosion have become

an increasingly important driver of displacement in recent years, with an estimated 26,000 people losing their land each year ([IPS](#), 29 October 2014). Between 2008 and 2013 Bangladesh had the fifth-highest number of people displaced by rapid-onset disasters worldwide in absolute terms ([IDMC](#), 17 September 2014, p.32).

## Displacement figures

### *Current numbers and major data gaps*

IDMC estimates that there are currently at least 431,000 IDPs in Bangladesh as a result of conflict and violence. The number newly displaced in 2014 is unknown. No systematic data collection takes place, and the information made available by the government, NGOs, academics and media sources is often limited, contested and outdated. Media sources that report violent incidents do not always include an estimate of the number of people displaced, even when the destruction of homes offers an indication of the figures involved. The absence of data also makes it difficult to determine if or when displacement has ended. Given that an unknown number of IDPs are all but invisible among urban slum dwellers, the overall figure is likely to be an underestimate.

Floods displaced more than 325,000 people in 2014, but the number displaced by disasters in previous years and who remain IDPs is unknown, as is the number displaced by development projects.

### *Chittagong Hill Tracts*

IDMC estimates that about 280,000 *Pahari* and Bengali settlers remain internally displaced in CHT. From a 2009 report by the Bangladesh Human Development Research Centre, we determined that as of 2007 there were 275,070 IDPs in CHT ([BHDRC](#), April 2009, pp.41-46). We based our calculation on 2001 census figures and the fact that 56,000 households, both *Pahari* and Bengali, "reportedly had experienced at least one displacement during [the] last 30 years" ([BHDRC](#),

### Estimated number of people displaced by armed conflict and violence

#### *Pahari and Bengali settlers*

<b>Location:</b>	CHT
<b>Cause and date:</b>	Armed conflict, inter-communal violence, since 1973
<b>Area of origin:</b>	CHT
<b>Peak number:</b>	More than 667,000 as of 2000
<b>Current number:</b>	280,000

Sources: [BHDRC](#), April 2009, pp.41-46; [IRIN](#), 12 May 2011; [IDMC](#), 30 December 2011, p.5; [AI](#), 12 June 2013; [Kapaeng Foundation](#), 2013; [Dhaka Tribune](#), 20 December 2014; [PCJSS](#), January 2013, p.50

#### Muslim Urdu speakers

<b>Location:</b>	Dhaka, Nilphamari, Chittagong, Rangpur and other districts
<b>Cause and date:</b>	Inter-communal violence, 1971
<b>Area of origin:</b>	Dhaka, Nilphamari, Chittagong, Rangpur and other districts
<b>Peak number:</b>	Several hundred thousand to more than a million as of 1972
<b>Current number:</b>	More than 151,000

Sources: [Redclift](#), 2012, pp.279-286; [van Schendel](#), 2009, p.173; [UNHCR](#), December 2009, p.1; [Kelley](#), 2009, p.7; [RSQ](#), 2006, pp.54-55

#### Hindus, Buddhists

<b>Location:</b>	Various
<b>Cause and date:</b>	Inter-communal violence, 2012-2014 and earlier
<b>Area of origin:</b>	Various
<b>Current number:</b>	Unknown

Sources: [GHRD](#), April 2013, pp.3-5; [BBC](#), 9 March 2013; [IRIN](#), 31 January 2014

**Total number: At least 431,000 IDPs**



April 2009, p.41). Based on an average household size of 5.2, 291,200 people were displaced between 1977 and 2007. Subtracting 16,130 returnees – 5,562 households reported the return of an average of 2.9 members – yields the overall figure (BHDRC, April 2009, p.41). No assessment has since been carried out to determine to what extent those affected have achieved durable solutions, but IDMC believes that most could still be displaced.

Available sources also suggest that thousands of people have been displaced since 2007. Tens of thousands of *Pahari* reportedly fled their homes between 2001 and 2011 as a result of tensions and clashes between *Pahari* and Bengalis (IRIN, 12 May 2011; IDMC, 30 December 2011, p.5; AI, 12 June 2013). In August 2013, Bengalis carried out arson attacks on 13 indigenous villages in the Matiranga-Taidong area of Khagrachari district, displacing 1,900 people internally and forcing between 1,500 and 2,000 to flee across the border into the Indian state of Tripura (OCHA, 9 June 2014; CHTDF, 2014, p.9; Kapaeeng Foundation, 2013; The Hindu, 5 August 2013; CERDC, 6 August 2013). In December 2014, the burning down of more than 50 indigenous homes by Bengali settlers in Rangamati district forced their inhabitants, or more than 260 people calculating with a family size of 5.2, to flee into the forest (Dhaka Tribune, 20 December 2014; CHTC, 18 December 2014; BHDRC, April 2009, p.41).

Displacement peaked in 2000, when the government reported more than 90,000 indigenous and more than 38,000 non-indigenous families living as IDPs (PCJSS, January 2013, p.50). Based on an average family size of 5.2, the overall figure was likely to have been around 667,000 people (IDMC, 30 December 2011, p.20).

PCJSS opposes counting internally displaced Bengali settlers as IDPs, because it considers them intruders in the region, and sections D(1) and D(2) of the CHT peace accord only provide for the

“rehabilitation of the tribal refugees and internal tribal evacuees” (GoB and PCJSS, 2 December 1997). Under the definition of an IDP in the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, however, they should be counted as such. NGOs have also pointed out that the government excluded around 50,000 indigenous IDPs and an unknown number among the 70,000 who fled to India in the late 1980s and became IDPs after their forced repatriation in 1997 (ACHR, February 2009; AITPN, December 2008, pp.5-6, 17).

#### *Urdu-speaking people*

IDMC estimates that more than 151,000 Urdu speakers remain internally displaced, living in 116 slum-like settlements that were previously displacement camps in urban areas. The figure is based on an unpublished 2006 study by the NGO Al-Falah Bangladesh. Almost half are in Dhaka. Their number has likely increased since the study, given a high birth rate and the growth of the settlements (Redclift, June 2013, p.24; IRIN, 27 August 2013; Kelley, 2009, p.10; RSQ, 2006, p.55; Redclift, 2012, pp.64, 279-286). They have received no restitution or compensation for their lost land and property, live in dire conditions and face discrimination in exercising their rights, and as such they should be considered IDPs. Others who were displaced but now live outside the former camps can be considered to have integrated locally.

#### *Disasters and climate change*

In 2013 cyclone Mahasen displaced 1.1 million people in Bangladesh. It was the world’s fourth-largest displacement caused by a disaster that year (IDMC, 17 September 2014, p.58). The Brahmanbaria tornado forced another 37,000 to flee their homes (IDMC database, 9 October 2014). Floods displaced more than 22,000 people, and hundreds more families living near the Jamuna river in Sirajganj district were affected by flooding and riverbank erosion (IDMC database, 9 October 2014; Reuters, 23 May 2013).

In 2014, between 50,000 and 70,000 people who

had moved onto shoals after losing their land to riverbank erosion were affected by monsoon floods and further erosion ([IPS](#), 29 October 2014). As of September, floods had displaced more than 325,000 people nationwide ([IFRC](#), 8 September 2014, p.1). The number of people who remain displaced after fleeing disasters is unknown.

## Displacement patterns

Ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities make up the majority of people displaced by conflict and violence in Bangladesh, but IDP figures are generally not disaggregated by sex, age or location. Many are living in protracted displacement, having fled their homes in 1971 or since 1973. Most live outside camps.

Most IDPs in CHT, both *Pahari* and Bengali settlers, have taken refuge within the region. Some *Pahari* women have migrated to urban areas, both in CHT and further afield, in search of income because they lost their traditional livelihoods when they were dispossessed of their land ([BHDRC](#), 2009, pp.41-46; [ICIP-CHT](#), 31 October 2013, pp.3-4). A number have been displaced several times, and some families have split, with some members fleeing and others staying behind ([BHDRC](#), 2009, pp.41-46). In February 2011, 27 *Pahari* families, including people who had already been displaced by conflict in 1979 and whose land has since been occupied by Bengali settlers, were forced to flee to the forest following clashes with the settlers ([AI](#), 12 June 2013, pp.21-22).

Most Urdu-speaking IDPs fled to places near their home areas. Those displaced in Dhaka's Mohammadpur and Mirpur took refuge in the same areas, while residents of villages across Rajshahi division fled to Saidpur town in the division's Nilphamari district. The majority of Urdu-speaking IDPs were living in urban areas before their displacement ([Redclift](#), 2012, pp.56-64).

Some IDPs displaced by riverbank erosion have had to move a number of times because the areas they relocated to suffered similar impacts ([Reuters](#), 23 May 2013; [Feldman and Geisler](#), 7 April 2011, p.6; [Banerjee et al](#), 2005, pp.177-178). The majority, however, have fled to urban areas, where they have settled in slums ([Shaw et al](#), 13 June 2013, p.28). According to one estimate, up to 50 per cent of Bangladesh's urban slum dwellers are IDPs forced to flee their rural homes as a result of riverbank erosion. Dhaka is affected by monsoon flooding and many of its slums are in low-lying areas, meaning this group is also exposed to hazards and disasters in their places of refuge ([IRIN](#), September 2007, p.41).

With the exception of displaced Urdu speakers, the number of urban IDPs is unknown.

## Protection concerns

Very little information is available on the protection challenges that IDPs in Bangladesh face today. There is some evidence of threats to their physical security and their difficulties accessing basic rights and civil documentation.

### *Physical security*

Continuing violence between *Pahari* and Bengali settlers, and among different *Pahari* groups has contributed to the insecurity of civilians in CHT ([AI](#), 12 June 2013; [GHRD](#), April 2013; [IRIN](#), 2 August 2013; [CHTC](#), 18 February 2014; [SAHR](#), 2013). *Pahari* women and children continue to suffer sexual violence, including rape ([ICIP-CHT](#), 31 October 2013; [GHRD](#), April 2013; [IWGIA](#), May 2014; [IWGIA](#), 20 February 2014). IDPs are likely to have been affected since they tend to live close to their home areas, but little information is available to confirm this.

In June 2014, an internally displaced girl was arrested and four internally displaced women were injured in a violent clash between *Pahari* and members of the paramilitary BGB in Khagrachari

district. They were trying to access their homes, from which the BGB had evicted them a month earlier in order to set up a battalion headquarters ([Daily Star](#), 14 July 2014).

The same month, ten IDPs living in Kurmitola in Mirpur, Dhaka, most of them women and children, were killed and at least 50 injured when tensions between local Bengali inhabitants in the surrounding area and displaced Urdu speakers led to inter-communal violence. Their homes were set on fire and there were allegations that local police stood by or even shot at Urdu-speaking residents, whose representatives claimed the violence was part of a series of attempts to force them off valuable land ([Al-Jazeera](#), 14 June 2014; [New Age](#), 15 June 2014; [Redclift](#), 22 July 2014; [Daily Star](#), 19 June 2014).

#### *Equal access to basic rights*

The more than 151,000 Urdu-speaking IDPs continue to face discrimination in accessing their rights, including education, employment, health care and housing. Their slum-like settlements are overcrowded and lack basic sanitation ([IRIN](#), 27 August 2013; [RSQ](#), 2006, pp.55-56).

Urdu-speaking IDPs living in Dhaka have been forcibly evicted because the status of the land on which they were set up in 1972 tends to be unclear, and its value has increased. In 1995 and 1996 the government's National Housing Authority sold land in Mirpur on which 40 camps had been built, but offered no solutions for residents. Some were evicted after the new owners took the issue to court in 2007 ([Redclift](#), 22 July 2014). In May 2013, 1,000 Urdu-speaking IDPs were evicted from the Dhaka building they were living in, which was close to collapse, but they were not adequately compensated ([Dhaka Tribune](#), 21 July 2013; [Rahman](#), 14 July 2014).

#### *Civil documentation*

Unlike the first generation of Urdu-speaking IDPs, who remained stateless for decades, second

and third generations feel better integrated into Bangladeshi society, and a majority have backed formal recognition of their Bangladeshi citizenship. A number of High Court decisions since the 1990s have confirmed their status, and in 2008 all Urdu speakers became eligible to receive national identity cards. An estimated 80 per cent chose to do so ([IRIN](#), 27 August 2013; [Kelley](#), 2009, pp.10-11, 14-15). As of June 2014, however, they still had difficulty obtaining passports. It appears that municipal authorities continue to question their entitlement to citizenship because they live in informal settlements that used to be displacement camps ([New Age](#), 17 June 2014).

## **Durable solutions**

The government has no comprehensive programme to facilitate durable solutions, making protracted displacement a growing problem. In the absence of the systematic profiling of IDPs' needs, little is known about whether they would prefer to return to their homes, integrate locally or settle elsewhere in the country. Neither are there numbers for those who may already have done so.

IDPs in CHT are likely to prefer return to their home areas if they are able to access their ancestral land. Given ongoing tensions, violence and forced evictions, however, this has not been a viable option (see section on Causes of displacement above; [IDMC](#), 16 July 2009, p.21). Given that Bengali settlers have often occupied their land, and the absence of a viable mechanism to resolve land disputes, local integration may be a more immediate option for them if they are protected from forced eviction.

#### *Obstacles to solutions for Pahari IDPs*

The 1997 accord granted CHT semi-autonomous status and established a number of new institutions responsible for governing the region, including the Ministry of CHT Affairs, a regional council, a commission for resolving land disputes

and a task force for the rehabilitation of returned refugees and IDPs. It also provided for the demilitarisation of the region and the devolution of power ([GoB and PCJSS](#), 2 December 1997; [ECOSOC](#), 27 February 2014, p.7). A lack of political will on the part of successive governments in Dhaka has hampered implementation, however, and authorities' decision-making on development projects and their tolerance of further Bengali settlement have run counter to the spirit of the accord ([CHTDF](#), 2014, p.7; [AI](#), 12 June 2013, pp.17-18; [Adnan](#), May 2011, p.43).

The 1997 peace accord included provisions to resolve land issues, but implementation has faltered and, importantly for IDPs, the CHT Land Disputes Resolution Commission is yet to function properly. This is the result of contradictions between the 2001 Act that establishes the commission's powers and responsibilities, and the 1997 accord. A number of attempts at bringing the two into line have failed, and parliament has yet to table a new amendment to the Act ([ECOSOC](#), 18 February 2011, p.12; [Daily Star](#), 2 December 2014).

As recently as November 2014, three amendment bills to CHT council legislation were drafted without *Pahari* participation, but tabled as measures to improve their representation. According to advocates for *Pahari* rights, the bills actually did the opposite ([New Age](#), 23 November 2014; [BDNews24](#), 1 July 2014; [Daily Observer](#), 24 November 2014).

These shortcomings constitute a key reason why *Pahari* IDPs are unable to achieve durable solutions ([ECOSOC](#), 18 February 2011, p.15). They have not been able to recover lost land, and continue to face the threat of forced eviction to make way for development projects ([NHRC](#), October 2014, p.42). Responsibility for land management has still not been transferred to the local institutions established by the accord, nor has the role of traditional authorities been recognised ([NHRC](#), October 2014, p.43; [ECOSOC](#), 27 February 2014, pp.8-9). *Pahari* are not represented in politics at

the national level, meaning their interests tend not to be reflected in decision-making.

Violent clashes between *Pahari* groups, and between *Pahari* and Bengali settlers continue, as do human rights violations and the impunity of perpetrators linked to or supported by the security forces ([AI](#), 12 June 2013). Bangladesh has largely been under civilian rule since 1990, but CHT remains highly militarised ([van Schendel](#), 2009, p.213). In 2011 a third of the army was deployed in CHT and the ratio of soldiers to civilians was 1:40, compared with 1:1,750 in the rest of the country. Since 2001 the military has operated in CHT under Operation Uttoron, which allows it to intervene in civilian matters, including a significant role in maintaining law and order ([NHRC](#), October 2014, p.56; [IWGIA](#), 17 May 2012; [AI](#), 12 June 2013, p.23; [ECOSOC](#), 18 February 2011, pp.15-16).

Observers including the UN special rapporteur on indigenous issues report allegations that military and security forces have perpetrated human rights violations including arbitrary arrests, disappearances, torture, extrajudicial killings, harassment of rights activists and sexual harassment against *Pahari*, including IDPs. Those responsible, however, have largely benefited from impunity. Members of the security forces and local police have also reportedly stood by during clashes between *Pahari* and Bengali settlers, or even to have sided with the settlers, rather than protecting those in need regardless of ethnicity ([ECOSOC](#), 18 February 2011, p.15-16; [AI](#), 12 June 2013, pp.19-24; [van Schendel](#), 2009, pp.213-214).

A peace-building and reconciliation process is needed to give CHT's marginalised communities a voice, particularly on land issues. The government should safeguard the rights of ethnic and religious minorities more generally, prevent their displacement and forced eviction, and provide restitution or adequate compensation in line with international standards such as ILO convention no. 107, the UN Minorities Declaration, the Guiding

Principles and the Pinheiro Principles. Authorities should also adhere to the Basic Principles and Guidelines on Development-Based Evictions and Displacement (UNGA, A/HRC/4/18, 5 February 2007).

#### *Obstacles to solutions for Hindus*

The number of Hindus whose properties were confiscated under the Vested Property Act, but who have received compensation or had them restituted under the Vested Properties Return (Amendment) Bill of 2011 is not known. As such it is impossible to determine how many should still be considered IDPs ([BBC](#), 28 November 2011). The 2011 legislation was intended to address the shortcomings of the Vested Property Return Act (2001), which gave the government unlimited time to carry out restitution and left implementation to the discretion of local bureaucrats, making it ineffective ([SAHR](#), 2013, p.52).

## National response

Bangladesh has no national policy or legislation on IDPs' assistance and protection, and there is no institutional focal point for their issues. Nor does any government body systematically gather data on the number and needs of all groups of IDPs.

Bangladesh's National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), which was established in 2008, periodically advocates for IDPs' rights. It recently reviewed implementation of the 1997 CHT accord and its draft strategic plan for 2015 to 2018 identifies land issues in the region as a priority for its work ([NHRC](#), October 2014; [NHRC](#), 2014). It also denounced attacks on religious and ethnic minorities after the elections in early 2014 ([Independent](#), 16 January 2014; [Daily Star](#), 10 January 2014).

The 1997 CHT peace accord created new government institutions, including the Ministry of CHT Affairs, which it tasked with implementation, including the facilitation of solutions for returned

refugees and IDPs, a process which remains incomplete more than 17 years after it was signed.

National and local NGOs assist people displaced by conflict and violence and advocate for their rights, but groups opposed to their work have hampered their efforts. Members of the international CHT commission were attacked twice while visiting the region in 2014, and local police failed to protect them ([Dhaka Tribune](#), 28 August 2014; [Daily Star](#), 17 July 2014). National NGOs including Al-Falah Bangladesh, the Shamsul Huque Foundation, the Council of Minorities and OBAT Helpers have assisted Urdu-speaking IDPs in recent years ([Redclift](#), June 2013, p.24).

The country has improved its disaster risk reduction and management, making it a global leader ([UNDP](#), last checked 12 January 2015). The Ministry of Food and Disaster Management is the entity responsible, with the Disaster Management Bureau and the Department of Disaster Management serving as subsidiary bodies. It is currently operating under the National Plan for Disaster Management for 2010 to 2015 ([GoB](#), 30 April 2010). Bangladesh is a signatory to the Millennium Development Goals, the Hyogo Framework of Action, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation's Framework for Action and Agenda 21 ([India Quarterly](#), 2012, p.44).

The country's response to climate change is guided by a number of laws and frameworks, including the 2009 Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan, but they tend to focus on emergency response rather than prevention of displacement. A strategy for the protection of people displaced as a result of climate change is still lacking ([MoEF](#), 2009; [Leckie](#), July 2014, p.131).

A comprehensive policy or legal framework would help to ensure a more consistent and effective national response to displacement caused by vio-



lence, disasters, climate change and land grabs, all of which are prevalent.

## International response

Given the protracted nature of most displacement in Bangladesh, international support for IDPs has tended to come from the development rather than the humanitarian sector. It has focused on the general population in regions that have experienced displacement, including CHT and areas affected by disasters, rather than IDPs themselves. The work of development organisations is coordinated via a local consultative group made up of the government, bilateral and multilateral development partners and UN agencies, and the Ministry of Finance's aid effectiveness unit. There is, however, no specific focus on displacement or IDPs' protection ([LCG](#), LCG mechanism, last checked 6 January 2015; [LCG](#), HCTT, last checked 6 January 2015; [UNDP](#), 1 November 2011, p.5).

The Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Facility (CHTDF) was set up in 2003 to support the institutions responsible for governing the region in the promotion of peace and development. It is managed by UNDP and the EU is the largest donor, funding \$92.6 million or 58 per cent of its budget. In 2013 it carried out a household survey focusing on development challenges in the region, but the information collected did not include data on IDPs or durable solutions ([CHTDF](#), 2014, p.6; [UNDP](#), 28 June 2012).

The UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and the special rapporteur on indigenous peoples' rights have advocated on CHT and issues relevant to IDPs.

UNDP, the Food and Agriculture Organisation, the World Health Organisation, the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank, the International Development Bank and government donors have supported the Bangladeshi authorities in their response to disasters including

displacement, as have national and international NGOs ([India Quarterly](#), 2012, p.43). Following cyclone Sidr in 2007 the World Bank initiated an emergency cyclone recovery and restoration project for the construction and upgrading of cyclone shelters, a key element in improved preparedness and response to cyclone Mahasen and resulting displacement in 2013 ([World Bank](#), 16 June 2013).

## About the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) is the leading source of information and analysis on internal displacement. For the millions of people worldwide displaced within their own country, IDMC plays a unique role as a global monitor and evidence-based advocate to influence policy and action by governments, UN agencies, donors, international organisations and NGOs.

IDMC was established in 1998 at the request of the Interagency Standing Committee on humanitarian assistance. Since then, IDMC's unique global function has been recognised and reiterated in annual UN General Assembly resolutions.

IDMC is part of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), an independent, non-governmental humanitarian organisation.

### Contact:

#### **Caroline Howard**

Head of Middle East, Europe, the Caucasus and Asia Department

Tel: +41 22 795 07 40

E-mail: [caroline.howard@nrc.ch](mailto:caroline.howard@nrc.ch)

#### **Anne-Kathrin Glatz**

Regional Analyst

Tel: +41 22 799 07 07

E-mail: [ak.glatz@nrc.ch](mailto:ak.glatz@nrc.ch)

#### **IDMC**

Norwegian Refugee Council

Chemin de Balxert 7-9

1219 Geneva, Switzerland

[www.internal-displacement.org](http://www.internal-displacement.org)

Tel: +41 (0)22 799 0700

Fax: +41 (0)22 799 0701