Migrants on the margins

Royal Geographical Society with IBG

Advancing geography and geographical learning



Michael Collyer and Laura Hammond November 2021

Acknowledgements

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Colleagues at:

SOAS University of London, University of Sussex, Durham University, Goldsmiths University of London, University of Sheffield, the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) and Satellite Applications Catapult.

The Society's Field Research Programme Advisorv Group:

Professor Alison Blunt, Alistair Carr, Professor Georgina Endfield, Dr Mark Mulligan, Paul Rose, Dr John Shears, Professor David Thomas and Professor Katie Willis.

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Professor Dame Judith Rees (Chair) and Professor Sir Gordon Conway.

Society staff:

Migrants on the margins was conducted under the Directorship of Dr Rita Gardner and many of the Society's staff contributed in various ways, including Dr Catherine Souch who was the primary contact for the research team, Dr Laura Price who developed the educational resources, and Amy Williams who led on the Society's communications and public outreach work.





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Preface

Most migrants moving away from humanitarian crises move only short distances, and typically intend to return. However, with limited choices, many move into marginal urban areas of informal housing already facing serious resource constraints, and then often become trapped. These movements are among the most significant and least studied of all global mobility patterns.

Migrants on the margins has been an ambitious undertaking, addressing several interlinked geographical themes - migration, environmental change and urban governance - and working collaboratively with partners in Bangladesh, Somaliland, Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe. The project's global partnership, led by an expert interdisciplinary research team and their collaborators, has not only shed light on the life chances of migrants in some of the world's most vulnerable neighbourhoods, but has also sought to improve the lives of residents in these areas through local connections. recommendations and capacity building.

In particular, the research shows that migration is unlikely to be stopped, that tenure security is vital to improving living conditions, and that gender differences remain fundamental. Accepting these results is necessary for policy interventions to be successful.

With global issues such as climate change disproportionately impacting those living on the margins, collaborative research such as this has never been more important. However, Migrants on the margins has gone one step further and offered meaningful opportunities to engage audiences, from school children to the public, with the relevance of geography, demonstrating its importance in the world today. I am honoured to have played a small part in its success as part of my role on the Society's Council.

> Lynda, Baroness Chalker of Wallasey, President 2018-2021

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Executive summary

Migrants on the margins was a five-year collaborative field research project that investigated the movement of migrants into and around four of the world's most pressured cities: Colombo in Sri Lanka, Dhaka in Bangladesh, Harare in Zimbabwe and Hargeisa in Somaliland. Supported by the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG), the research team adopted a comparative approach to look at the opportunities available to migrants in order to better understand their experiences and vulnerabilities.

Research in the four cities engaged with both newly arrived and well-established residents of 13 neighbourhoods, and involved focus groups, surveys, walk along interviews, oral histories, Q methodology, and GIS and participatory community mapping workshops.

The key findings from the project have shed light on the incredible challenges of living in the neighbourhoods studied as well as the significant levels of population mobility, or churn, within these communities. The research also highlights the impact of clear gender differences in men's and women's roles in communities, as well as the effect of evictions and tenure security on residents, and how people can easily become 'trapped' within these neighbourhoods.

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Results from the research are continuing to influence policy within the four cities, and the research team have worked to support local policy makers and municipalities to improve the situations that migrants find themselves in. Solutions are achievable when policy makers consider that migration is unlikely to be stopped, that tenure security is the first step to sustainable improvements in residents' living conditions, gender differences remain fundamental to any policy interventions, and climate change is a factor in reducing mobility resulting in residents becoming 'trapped'.

Beyond these policy recommendations and direct work with local community groups and key stakeholders, outputs from the project include exhibitions in each of the research cities, alongside two further exhibitions in London, which were attended by several thousand people. There have been lectures and events, including two Monday night lectures at the Society, support for numerous research students, and a programme of educational material for schools that has won two awards in the UK.

Introduction

Between now and 2050 virtually all of the world's population growth will occur in cities. This growth will be predominantly concentrated in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, the only two major world regions in which fewer than half the population currently lives in cities. Fertility is typically lower in urban areas than in surrounding rural districts, so urban population growth is driven disproportionately by migration. The majority of migrants to cities in these regions are poor and are

attracted to neighbourhoods with few barriers to entry. This results in the expansion of low income, unplanned neighbourhoods, which have long presented a challenge to city authorities to manage equitably.



Wilfred Kajese

These observations were the starting point for the *Migrants on the margins* research project, which explored the impact of migration to low income neighbourhoods in selected cities in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Starting in 2015 and running over five years, it set out to demonstrate the centrality of geography to major contemporary world issues. The research tackled the interrelated themes of migration, urban growth, economic development, political violence, and climate change using a huge range of methods and analysis.

From the original formulation of the project to its conclusion, the project team worked with partners in Bangladesh, Somaliland, Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe, and original fieldwork took place in Dhaka, Hargeisa, Colombo and Harare. These cities were selected as they are of varying size and all face significant planning issues related to urban growth, predominantly caused by migration. Movement into all four cities is at least

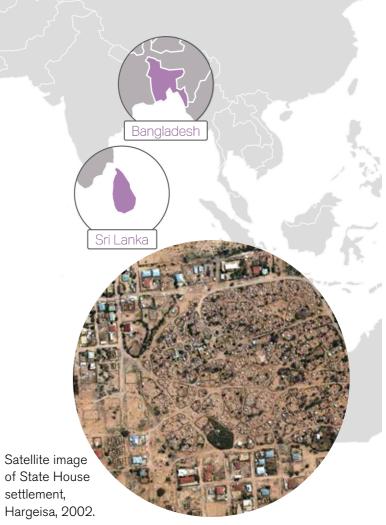
Migrants on the Margins Study Areas

A satellite map showing the locations of the four study countries: Bangladesh, Somaliland, Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe.

Tasfiq Mahmoo

partially forced, resulting from political violence, climate change, poverty or combinations of all three. The selection of these cities allowed for comparison across and between Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

Research in the four cities was focused in 13 lowincome neighbourhoods, selected as each has a substantial history of in-migration. Research involved both newly arrived and well-established residents of those neighbourhoods as well as community organisations, representatives of urban and national governments, national and international NGOs and international organisations. Regular stakeholder meetings were part of the broader engagement process in all four cities, explaining stages of research to everyone involved and feeding back results. There were exhibitions in each city and two in London, attended by several thousand people. Results continue to influence policy in all four cities and the project team are continuing to follow up results.



The team

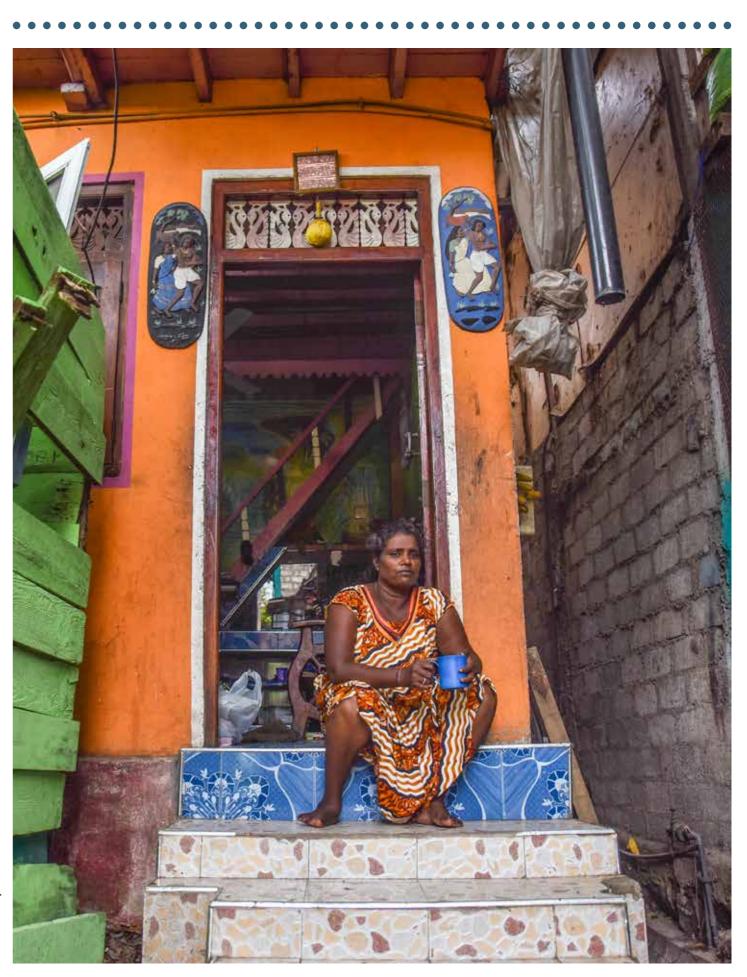


The international interdisciplinary project team was coordinated by Professor Michael Collyer from the University of Sussex, working closely with Professor Laura Hammond (SOAS). Nine UK researchers were drawn from Durham University, SOAS, University of London and the University of Sussex. Professor Michael Collyer was research lead for Colombo; Professor Laura Hammond (SOAS) for Hargeisa; Professor JoAnn McGregor (Sussex) for Harare; and Dr Andrew Baldwin (Durham) for Dhaka. They were joined by two PhD students, Selina Pasirayi (working on Harare) and Mohammed Mohideen Alikhan (working on Colombo), both at Sussex; two MA students, Yassmin Mohamed and Nouradin Abdirahmn H Nour, SOAS; and postdoctoral researcher Dr Chris Smith (Sussex). They were joined by Dr Nishat Awan (Goldsmiths, University of London), Professor Richard Black (SOAS), and experts from collaborating institutions in each country including Abdullah Azam, Kopalapillai Amirthalingam, Danesh Jayatilka, Sakeena Alikhan and Shenali Desilva (Colombo); Dr Saleemul Huq, Naznin Nasir, Feisal Rahman and Meraz Mostafa (Dhaka); Dr Kudzai Chatiza, Elmond Bandauko Beth Chitekwe-Biti, Edwina Chatiza and George Masimba Nyama (Harare); and Abdullahi Odowa, Ayan Yusuf and Mustafa Ibrahim (Hargeisa).

Members of the team had long standing collaborative relationships with partners in each city. In Colombo this was the Centre for Migration Research and Development (CMRD), in Dhaka, the International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD), in Harare, the Development Governance Institute (DGI) and in Hargeisa, the University of Hargeisa.

The team worked closely with colleagues at the Society throughout the project and received invaluable support from Terri Freemantle at the UK Satellite Applications Catapult in the project's final stages.

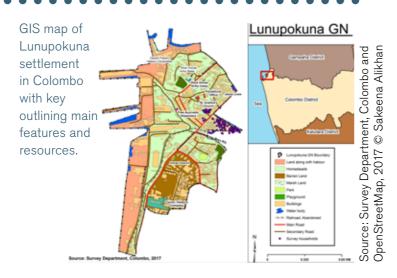
Research locations



Colombo

Sri Lanka's largest city, Colombo, reflects the ethnic and religious diversity of the island. The city's population is about 750,000, but the Greater Colombo urban area has a population of more than two million. Colombo has a hot tropical climate with a monsoon season that results in localised flooding every year. Due to the history of urban development of the city, there is very little spatial difference between the wealthy and the poor. The centre of Colombo has old colonial buildings with plenty of hotels to accommodate tourists, while informal settlements and communities have developed in any space available - often originating in the gardens of larger properties. It is the city's diversity that makes it so distinct from elsewhere in the country, with three broad ethnic groups - Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim living, working and interacting at close quarters.

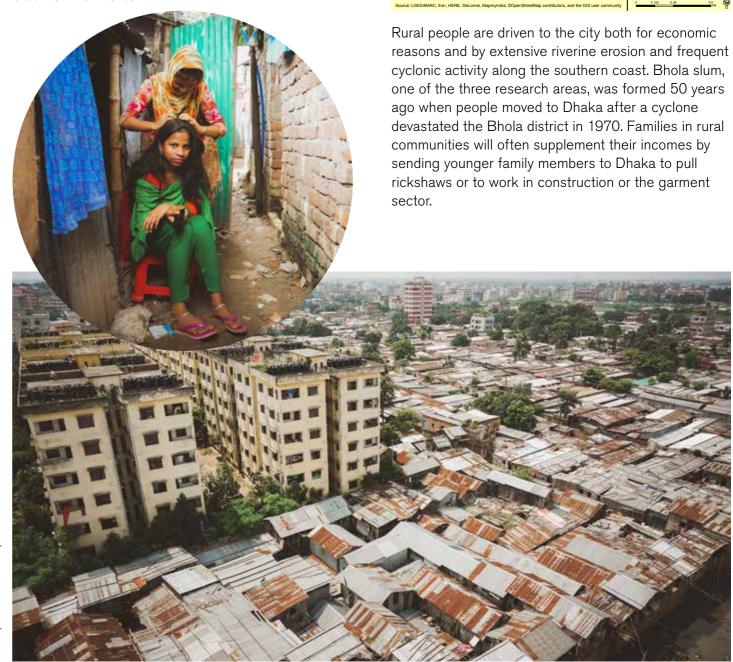
In Colombo migrants move from rural or plantation areas to the city often in the hope of seeking better employment opportunities and accessing better infrastructure. But movement has also been driven by environmental change and conflict. Many members of the communities studied have also moved within the city several times due to evictions or forced relocations.



Dhaka

Bangladesh's capital city, Dhaka, is located along the Buriganga River. With an estimated population of nine million, not only is Dhaka Bangladesh's largest city, it is also among the world's most densely populated. Its booming economy has come with numerous infrastructural improvements in recent years. Yet social life in Dhaka continues to be marked by vast disparities of wealth between rich and poor. Informal settlements proliferate around the city with large numbers of people living in close proximity in fragile urban environments.

GIS map of Ershadnagar settlement in DCC Ward 20, Dhaka with key outlining main features and resources.





Abdullah Az

© Tasfiq Mahmood photos: ÷



Harare



GIS map of the Hopley settlement in Harare with key outlining main features and resources.

Harare attracts rural migrants looking for jobs, though unemployment is very high as the country has experienced economic crisis, deindustrialisation and decline. But the city has also been affected by forced displacements, provoked by land occupations and the mass urban demolitions of 2005, as well as by peri-urban land invasions and state resettlement. The past demolitions hang heavily over people's lives as they fear a recurrence and lack tenure security.

Hargeisa

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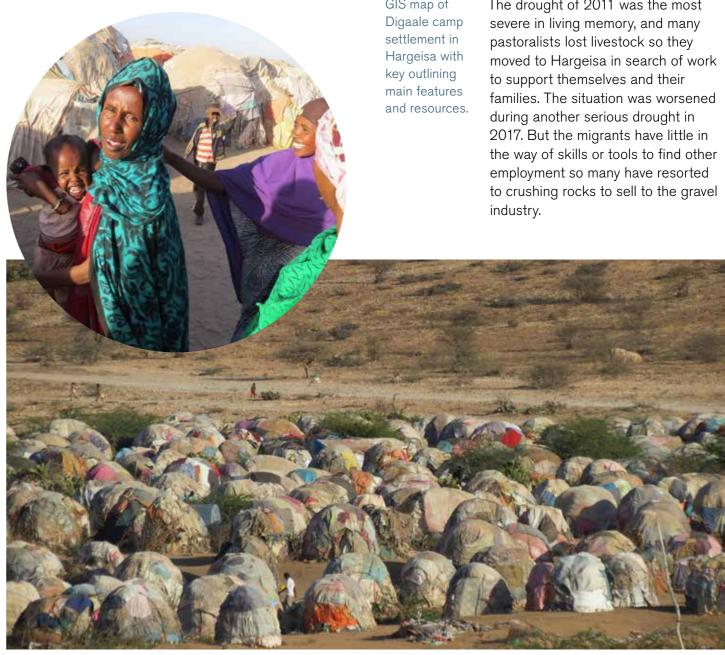
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Hargeisa is the capital of Somaliland, a former British colony which unilaterally declared independence from the rest of Somalia in 1991, but has yet to be internationally recognised. A brutal civil war between 1988-91 resulted in most of the city being destroyed. After 25 years of rebuilding amid a climate of relative

peace, the city now has an estimated one million

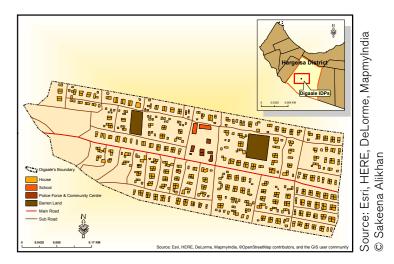
people living there and is continuing to grow.

People have moved to Hargeisa for a variety of reasons. The construction boom in the city has started to draw people from other areas, but environmental change has also been a strong factor.



Harare is the capital of Zimbabwe, a former settler colony that gained independence in 1980. The city has a long history of labour migration from neighbouring countries particularly Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia as well as from the countryside. It is a city that is divided in terms of wealth and has suffered dramatic impoverishment through two decades of political and economic turmoil from 2000. The northern parts of the city are more affluent and include the former 'white' suburbs, which are home to the country's elite. The southern part of the city is high density and includes the former African townships, as well as some new middle-class developments. Informal settlements have expanded dramatically since 2000.





GIS map of

The drought of 2011 was the most

Natalie Soysa

The research team adopted a wide range of methods, sequencing participatory, quantitative and qualitative approaches to extract the maximum insights from each. Each stage of research was coordinated across the four cities, so that each method was applied at approximately the same time.

Having developed contacts in each of the 13 neighbourhoods, research began with a series of focus group discussions with residents. To ensure everyone had a chance to give their views, three separate focus groups were held in each neighbourhood, with women, younger people and a mixed group.

The focus groups fed directly into the use of the Q methodology, which is a useful way of linking qualitative and quantitative methods. Interviewees are asked to rank a set of short statements depending on how far they agree with them. Q-interviews were conducted with over 150 people in each of the four cities about the neighbourhoods they lived in and the impact on mobility. Since everyone ranked the same statements on the same grid, the resulting pattern identified groups of people with very similar attitudes to place and mobility.

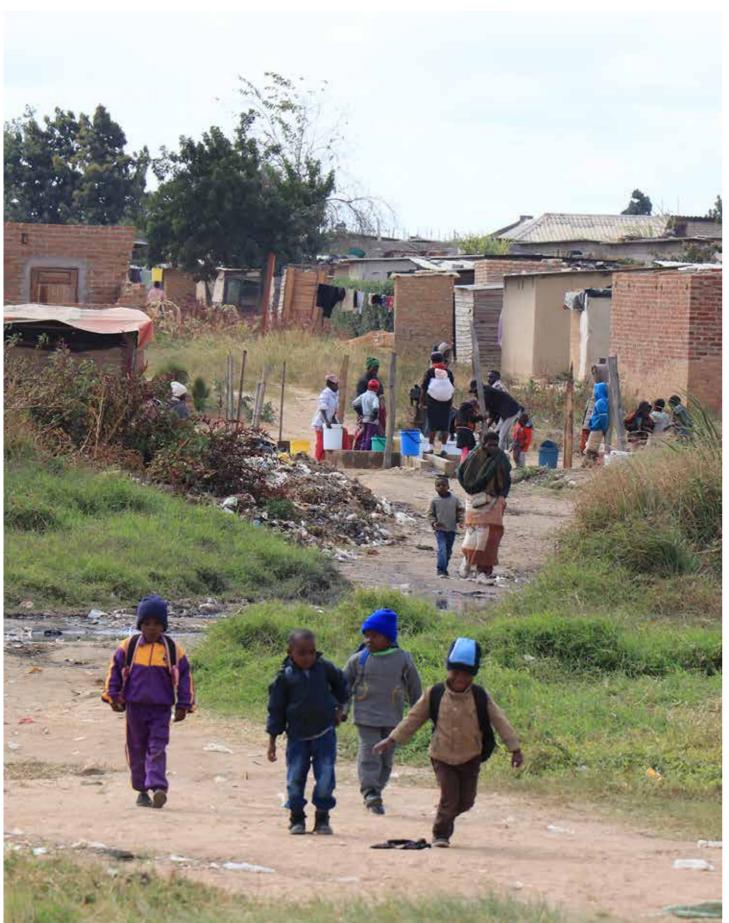
These attitude groups became key variables in a baseline survey, which involved more than 2,000 households. Respondents were asked to identify with a particular group, as well as about their migration and residential history. One year after the first questionnaire, approximately half of the initial respondents were interviewed again to investigate how things had changed. The first survey was used to identify 50 residents in each city for more detailed follow up interviews. A similar number of stakeholders, with relevant professional experience, were also interviewed.

Where participants agreed, these were recorded and transcribed.

The team also experimented with three other innovative methods: walkalong interviews, filmed migration histories, and comics. Walkalong interviews are a form of participatory mapping and involved a researcher accompanying a resident on a usual journey or route around their neighbourhood, discussing and often photographing different locations. Filmed migration histories developed an alternative approach, with residents being invited to draw a map of their migration patterns to and from their current neighbourhood. These interviews were filmed, focusing the camera only at their hands as they narrated and drew their movements, in order to preserve anonymity. The development of comics provided another way of visualising oral histories to discuss key points with interviewees.

Finally, each city team examined national archives to find out about the history of each of the selected neighbourhoods. In some instances, the team found archive aerial photos and worked with the Satellite Applications Catapult to identify high resolution satellite imagery, going back to 2002, which, in some cases, pre-dated the origin of the neighbourhoods. These provided a fascinating time series of the research areas. Taken together this range of methods has provided an incredibly rich and diverse store of data.

Why do people move?



A fundamental question in any investigation of migration is 'why do people move?'. The simple balance of 'push' and 'pull' factors is clear but not usually sufficient as it fails to offer explanations of circular migration, particularly why people with similar characteristics move in different directions. Nevertheless, this research provides two significant contributions to this debate.

First, despite the incredible challenges of living in the 13 neighbourhoods studied, large majorities of residents in all cities reported that they were either 'doing well', or 'coping' and this did not fall significantly amongst migrants. Residents are generally content despite incredibly difficult conditions because living where they do is better than the other options that are open to them. This simple fact suggests that net in-migration to these neighbourhoods is likely to continue.

The second, more surprising, element of migration is the extent of mobility from these neighbourhoods. The research design, with a second survey one year after the first involving the same households, highlighted significant movement between surveys. This varied significantly between cities; in Colombo fewer than two percent of households reported that a family member had left during the year. In Dhaka, this rose to 11%, 18% in Hargeisa and 22% in Harare - an unusual degree of population mobility or 'churn'. Migrants to these cities appear more likely to be mobile.

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Gender differences



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Unsurprisingly, clear gender differences were found throughout the neighbourhoods, and a gender analysis enabled the team to trace the transformation of what are considered men's and women's roles amongst the residents.

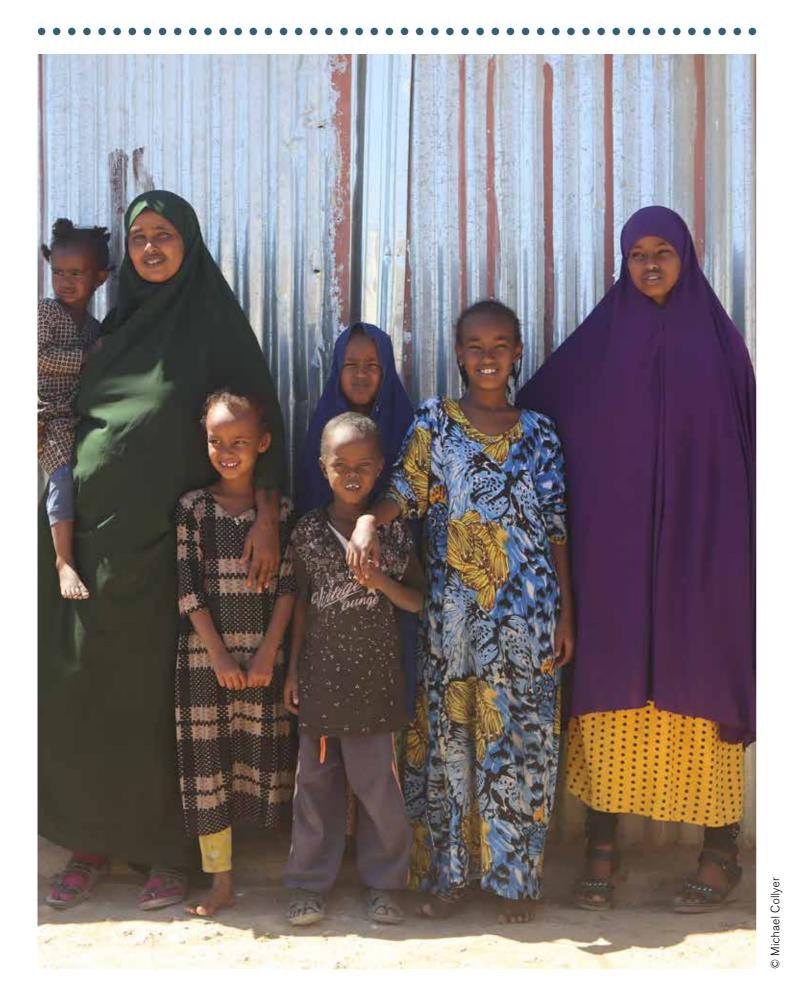
The shift from rural to urban lifestyles involves a major change in gender roles. In all cities, a substantial proportion of women engaged in paid work, which would have been extremely unusual in the more conservative rural societies that migrants came from. This rose to almost 50% in Dhaka, compared to 87% of men in that city. Across all four cities, 29% of women reported paid work compared to 69% of men. This reflects the necessity of taking up as many opportunities for income



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as possible, given the substantial costs of city living. The nature of occupations remained clearly gendered and the work more frequently undertaken by women offered significantly lower salaries. This highlights why households headed by women must remain a significant priority for development interventions, as such households are likely to be poorer than the average.

Evictions and tenure security



Evictions were found to be commonplace and extremely damaging to the long-term livelihoods of residents, even many years after the eviction had taken place. Although the instability of life in low-income neighbourhoods is well known, the commonality of evictions was unexpected. The lowest rate was in Colombo, although even here seven percent of residents in the four research neighbourhoods reported having been evicted at least once during their life in the city. The highest rate was in Harare, where 41% of residents had been evicted and people reported experiencing this up to six times. Over 20% of those interviewed in Harare had been evicted more than once - an experience that increased anxiety and made people much less likely to invest in the homes they had, even when they notionally had a degree of stability. In Hargeisa and Dhaka the figures were still extremely high at 27% and 32%, respectively. This leads to the concept of 'evictability', the fear of eviction which lasts long after the event has been experienced.

The frequency of evictions links to a further key finding, people use both visibility and invisibility strategically for protection and access to resources. This is an important theoretical point that has been discussed previously but the team's gualitative interviews allow greater understanding of this from residents' perspectives. Significant numbers of people reported that their initial decision to move to the city was prompted by fear of remaining where they were, either because of political violence or major environmental crises. This fear often leads to a desire to remain out of view of state authorities, at least in certain circumstances. Informal settlements provide ideal opportunities for this. Although residents themselves know who is moving in or out,

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this usually occurs outside the usual bureaucratic procedures that apply elsewhere in the city. Yet in different contexts, informal settlements as an issue of urban development remain highly visible. In Colombo, where the best overall census information exists, more than 50% of the city's population live in what the government refers to as 'underserved settlements'. The overall proportion is at least as high in the other three cities, although citywide data are not collected. This combination of individual invisibility and collective visibility has important consequences for planning. It becomes easier to dehumanise planning decisions and justify interventions that are focused on the larger picture and not the individuals. It is hoped this research has contributed to changing this process.

Trapped populations



© Abdullah Aza

One of the core aims of the project was to investigate if there were a group of people with no mobility options resident in the 13 neighbourhoods. Previous work had hypothesised that, significantly due to climate change, some people would move to the city and then become 'trapped', unable to move to better neighbourhoods but without the resources to move back. *Migrants on the margins* has found very clear evidence that this is the case, and significant numbers of people are 'trapped' in these neighbourhoods.

In each city, one of the statements that emerged from the Q interviews captured the experience of being trapped extremely accurately. For example, the factor analysis of Q interviews in Dhaka produced the following narrative: 'I had no choice but to move here. Although things are worse now than where I was before, they would be even worse if I had to leave this place. I don't have the capacity to leave and fear eviction'. In the surveys, respondents were asked



to select which statement best reflected their own views. In Dhaka 35% chose this narrative. It was similarly high in Colombo (41%) and Hargeisa (36%) but rather lower in Harare (16%). These groups are numerically very significant and should be a priority for any policy intervention in these neighbourhoods. Analysis of this data allows us to further understand what other characteristics are associated with the situation of being (or feeling) trapped.

Achievable solutions

It is important to recognise that migration is unlikely to be stopped. New legislation to stop the movement of people, where powerful underlying motivations for movement exist, is rarely successful. This is especially the case where people are moving within their own country. Such legislation has a much more significant impact creating and maintaining a particular impoverished underclass of people who have few rights and whose welfare is typically overlooked.

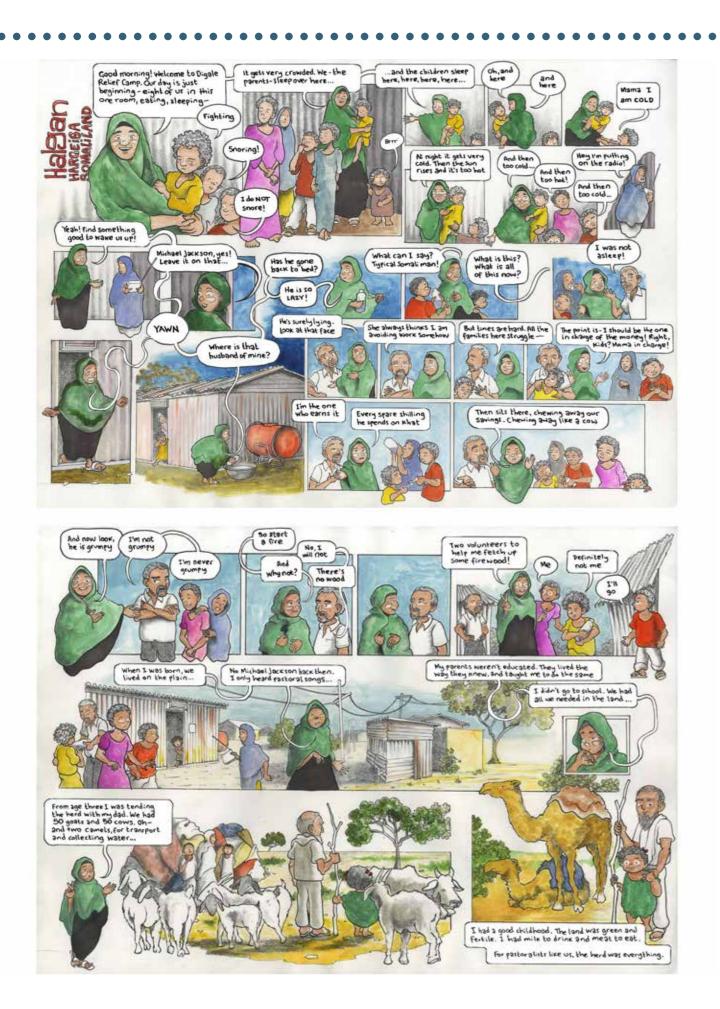
Gender differences remain fundamental to any policy **intervention.** This is widely appreciated in development work, but it is important to highlight and repeat. Not only does migration to urban areas transform the work of both men and women, but it transforms what is seen as men and women's work. These processes are important for understanding how gender relations are constructed and transformed. This is a more complex understanding of gender than simply sex differentiated analysis and should be implemented in policy approaches. Tenure security is the first step to longer term, sustainable improvements in residents' standard of living. The overwhelming, lasting impact of forced evictions is clearly demonstrated in this research project. Beyond this, the fear of forced evictions alone highlights how important it is to eliminate evictions from public policy interventions in low-income urban areas.



Wilfred Kajese



Climate change has a detrimental impact on city populations and affects chances of further mobility. Climate change is a significant factor explaining individual's initial migration to the city. In certain circumstances it contributes to trapping people in low-income neighbourhoods, increasing the cost of both onward and return migration and cutting access to resources needed to support such a move.



Results of the project have been pub

Results of the project have been published in relevant academic journals, and are open access so are publicly available. From the design of the project onwards, the aim was always to ensure that the project had broad impact. Three broad strategies were used to ensure the lasting impact of the project.

Stakeholder meetings were held regularly in all four cities. These involved residents of the communities being studied, as well as significant decision makers at all levels, including representatives of city and national planning departments, relevant community NGOs and international organisations, such as the World Bank. Where relevant representatives of the mayor's offices, municipal police departments and local housing cooperatives also attended. In Harare, monthly meetings were held during the research, whilst in other cities they were less regular but spread from the planning stage to the final results. These meetings helped stakeholders feel invested in the project, and in some cases add additional questions to surveys or interview processes.

A second lasting benefit of the meetings was the encounters they generated. For most of the residents who attended, this was the first opportunity they had to meet individuals responsible for the planning of their neighbourhoods. Many of the city officials also reported that they had not encountered residents of these neighbourhoods before. The planning challenges remain significant. Nevertheless, these stakeholder meetings have not only communicated research results but helped to generate a level of empathy and mutual understanding between different groups involved.

The second area of wider impact involved the **development of teaching resources**. As research results emerged, they fed into tailored teaching materials, prepared by the schools team at the Society, that were communicated to schools across

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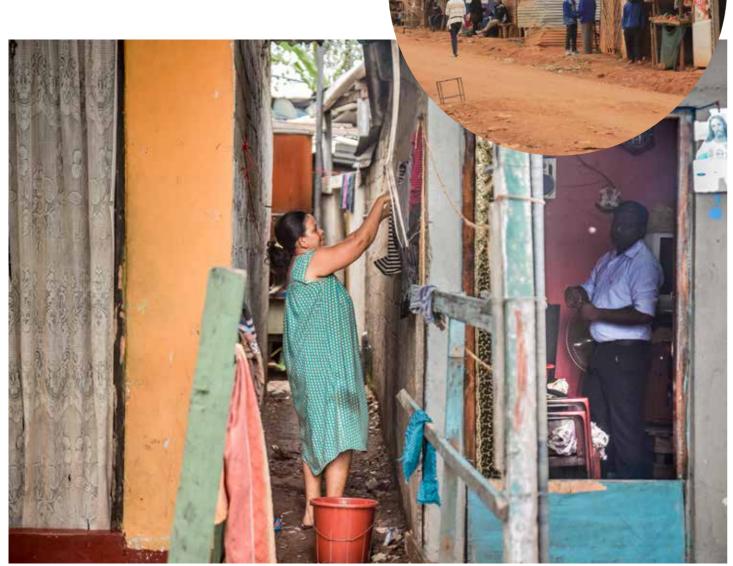
the UK. Teaching focused activities included short films, posters and comics presenting the stories of individuals who had migrated to each of the cities. These were all presented via the web pages that remain the online home of the project. These teaching materials earned the Society two awards, the overall award from the Society of Scottish Geography Teachers and a 4 star award in the Curriculum Impact category of the Teach Secondary Awards 2019. The resources were also shortlisted for a Bett award in 2020. They continue to be adapted and developed for use in the study countries and beyond.

Finally, the project has supported a number of **public** engagement activities. At the Society, these have included two exhibitions and two lectures in the Monday night lecture series as well as a panel at the 2019 Annual International Conference. These were accompanied by events in each of the cities where research took place. In Colombo, a public meeting and lecture accompanied an exhibition of comics and photos. In Dhaka, the team joined a related UK funded research project to organise a joint policy presentation and exhibition, attended by two ministers and other high level policy stakeholders. In Harare, an exhibition was accompanied by a final stakeholder meeting. Finally, in Hargeisa, an exhibition and a panel at the 2019 Hargeisa International Book Fair were organised, where the deputy minister of planning attended as a discussant. Events in all four cities were well covered in national news media and these events allowed the themes and main findings of the project to be widely discussed in various public contexts.

Next steps

Some elements of *Migrants on the margins* continue to develop, including academic publications and policy impact. There are a number of academic articles in preparation and the research team have plans for a collective book. Impacts of the research also continue to be tracked in the four cities. All of these are likely to take some years to fully emerge.

Thanks to a successful application for a further $\pounds 2$ million of research funding from the ESRC, the project team continues to work together in the four cities, including in seven of the original 13 neighbourhoods, until 2024 as part of the 'Inclusive Urban Infrastructure' project. The team remains in regular contact with the Society for updates.



Wilfred Ka

Funding sources

Support directly from the Society formed the core of this project. This included significant financial support, mostly from Fellows and members as well as extremely valuable support in kind, particularly from the communications, schools and research and higher education teams. The Society's financial support in part leveraged co-funding from universities to support students from the research countries. The University of Sussex provided 50% of the funding for two PhD students and SOAS provided 50% funding for two MA students, with the remaining funding for all four students coming from the Society.

In addition to funding coming directly from the Society, two research grants, worth just under \$700,000, were also received. Under the ESRC/ DFID Poverty Alleviation programme, funding for the project 'Supporting the social mobility of trapped populations in very poor urban areas' (grant number ES/N01474X/1) (\$430,625), funded the quantitative elements of the research. Then, under the joint ESRC/AHRC GCRF call on Forced Displacement, the project 'The Unknown City: the (in)visibility of urban displacement' (grant number ES/P005128/1) received \$257,249 to cover the qualitative parts of the research programme. Both projects ran for two years, from 2016 to 2018, covering the core period of fieldwork.

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Student support

The recruitment of PhD students at the University of Sussex began soon after the project started. Following a competitive application process, two strong candidates were selected: Mohammed Alikhan Mohideen, who had just started a lectureship in geography at the University of #Choose Peradeniya, one of Geography the best geography departments in Sri Lanka; and Selina Pasirayi, who had a long history of NGO work in Zimbabwe, most recently with Action Aid Zimbabwe. They both started in September 2016.

MA students were recruited in consecutive years at SOAS, in the 2017-18 and 2018-19 academic years. Both students, Yassmin Mohamed and Nouradin Abdirahmn H Nour, were recruited from Somaliland.

Capacity building

Beyond the PhD and MA scholarships supported by the project, the entire research team developed new skills and capabilities. The wide range of methods used, including several novel approaches, meant that everyone developed new skills. Training was conducted in two blocks. First, at an early stage in the research, a member of the UK team with quantitative expertise

visited each of the international partners to conduct a focused training in Q method in each city and help prepare the survey.

A second training event took place in Nairobi, which was attended by 22 people from all partners, and focussed on the new qualitative approaches, including participatory mapping and comics. A colleague from Goldsmiths, University of London, with expertise in participatory mapping led the event and the research team was able to experiment with walkalong interviews and filmed migration histories, which were later implemented in all cities.

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Front cover

A walk-along interview with residents in Camp A, Hargeisa © Chris Smith



