

1 **‘When we were children we had dreams, then we came to Dhaka to survive’:**
2 **Urban stories connecting loss of wellbeing, displacement and (im)mobility**

3 Dr Sonja Ayeb-Karlsson^{1,2} (<http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6124-2730>)

4 ¹*University of Sussex, Falmer Brighton, UK*

5 ²*United Nations University – Institute for Environment and Human Security, Bonn, Germany*

6 Address: Arts C308, University of Sussex, Brighton, BN1 9SJ, UK, Email: S.Ayeb-Karlsson@sussex.ac.uk

7 Telephone: +44 7719 027 861

8 **Abstract**

9 This article uses storytelling methodology to investigate the connections between urban
10 climate-induced loss of wellbeing and (im)mobility in Bhola Slum, an informal settlement in
11 Dhaka, Bangladesh. The settlement houses Internally Displaced People from the southern coast
12 who built and named the slum after their home – Bhola Island. The storytelling sessions
13 revealed that loss of belonging, identity, quality of life and social value produced in people a
14 desire to return. Nostalgic storylines of home also shaped the narratives of the children born in
15 the slum who often referred to the island as their home. Some women felt that the move had
16 resulted in more liberty, but also claimed that it had increased the risk of social punishment
17 and stigmatisation. Social stigma often extended from parents to children. More women than
18 men reported feeling unsafe, depressed and anxious. Both mental and physical ill health were
19 common consequences of the compromised living and working conditions of the slum. Loss
20 of health (due to injuries or disease) has damaged wellbeing and pushed already fragile families
21 into a downward spiral with no escape. Few empirical studies investigate ‘trapped’ populations
22 and non-economic losses and damages in urban environments. The insights gained from this
23 work can therefore help safeguard vulnerable populations worldwide and build more robust
24 climate policy frameworks.

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38 Keywords: climate change; diaspora; displacement; gender; human mobility;
39 immobility; mental health; Non-Economic Loss and Damage; slum wellbeing; Trapped
40 Populations

41 1. Introduction

42 Climate-induced (im)mobility, such as displacement, can have severe impacts on a person's
43 mental wellbeing. The study of non-economic losses and damages has been used as one way
44 to explore how environmental stress may influence wellbeing (Barnett et al 2016; Boyd et al.
45 2017; Tschakert et al. 2017, 2019). This article elaborates on the linkages between non-
46 economic loss and damage resulting from climate-induced migration, displacement and
47 immobility. The empirical connections between wellbeing loss and 'trapped' populations will
48 be studied through storytelling sessions carried out in an urban informal settlement¹ with
49 Internally Displaced People (IDP)² or an 'immobile' group of people from coastal Bangladesh.
50 After facing cyclones and riverbank erosion while living on Bhola Island, people migrated to
51 Dhaka and settled in a slum, the marginalised location of which exposes them further climatic,
52 environmental and social risks.

53 Global environmental changes generate fundamental challenges to most countries'
54 development progress. The unique location of Bangladesh in the Ganges-Brahmaputra delta
55 both provides the country with valuable natural resources and exposes its people to various
56 environmental threats (Pouliotte et al. 2009; Penning-Rowsell et al. 2013). One of the most
57 common responses for people dealing with environmental changes is to move away from them
58 (Blaikie et al. 1994; Black et al. 2011). People do what they can to escape, and to put
59 themselves, and their food security or livelihood sources, in a safe location. These movements

¹ In this article, the author chooses to broaden the use of the word 'slum' to also include urban and informal 'settlement'. This is to acknowledge and neutralise negative associations or stigma around words such as 'slum' and 'slum dwellers'. Since Bhola Slum was built without the permissions or support of the government, the settlement was determined illegal and the people living there accused of occupying government land. To avoid stigma and negative connotations, the author also refrains from using terms such as 'illegal' or 'occupants'.

² In this article, Internally Displaced People (IDP) refers to UNHCR's definition; "*persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border.*" For more information, see <https://emergency.unhcr.org/entry/250553/idp-definition>. For further details around people's self-identification as 'trapped' or 'immobile' in Bhola Slum, see Ayeb-Karlsson et al. 2020.

60 can take the shape of longer mobility processes, such as in the case of migration, or the mobility
61 can be a more sudden escape of an impending hazard, such as in the case of evacuation. Other
62 times people do not move, or manage to escape, and instead end up (in)voluntarily immobile
63 or ‘trapped’.

64 References to involuntary immobility have existed in the migration literature for some
65 time (e.g. Carling 2002; Lubkemann 2008). Adding to this, the Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)
66 literature describe people’s inability to escape risky locations and situations (e.g. Blaikie et al.
67 1994; Elliott and Pais 2006; Thiede and Brown 2013). However, the idea of populations being
68 ‘trapped’ in a geographical location by environmental hazards was largely unnoticed until its
69 appearance in the UK Government’s Foresight: Migration and Global Environmental Change
70 (MGEC) report (Foresight 2011). In this report, ‘trapped’ populations were proposed to define
71 those who are “*unable to move away from locations in which they are extremely vulnerable to*
72 *environmental change*” (Foresight 2011:9) as they are facing a “*double set of risks*” (Foresight
73 2011:14). This referred to people being unable to escape or move away from environmental
74 hazards, while at the same time being highly vulnerable to their impacts. Urban areas located
75 within low-income countries were therefore stated to be of particular concern (Foresight
76 2011:201).

77 Migration towards such high-risk locations, and the potential for people to become
78 ‘trapped’ in them was a key concern. Even though the concept marked an important step in the
79 process of improving the protection of vulnerable people, little in the way of critical analysis
80 around the concept’s potential, evidence of its empirical existence, living conditions and
81 wellbeing of ‘trapped’ populations, have until today been registered. This conceptual weakness
82 perhaps emerged as a by-product of the long running dispute over the role of the environment
83 within the literature body of migration studies (Baldwin et al. 2016; Ayeb-Karlsson et al. 2018).

84 This study therefore responds to the clear need for more research around (im)mobility
85 and wellbeing to better support people facing climate change impacts. Since its appearance,
86 Trapped Populations³ has largely been framed as a seemingly straightforward concept,
87 generally referring to geographically ‘trapped’ populations in environmentally high risk rural
88 areas due to mainly socio-economic constraints. The underlying reasons for someone’s
89 immobility, and how their immobility state interacts with someone’s wellbeing can however
90 be profoundly complex. In recent years a large number of articles have also emerged that
91 question and extend our understanding of immobility and ‘trapped’ populations (Baldwin et al.
92 2016; Ayeb-Karlsson et al. 2018, 2020; Schewel 2019). A more comprehensive analysis of
93 how people’s social and psychological backgrounds influence their (im)mobility and wellbeing
94 can help improve our understanding of the relations between climate-induced immobility and
95 lost or damaged wellbeing. This will be important to better protect and support people facing
96 climatic risks while building more robust and well-informed climate policy frameworks.

97 Extending immobility from a geographical to a social and psychological process
98 through the study of its interaction with someone’s wellbeing will serve to widen our idea of
99 immobility. To do so, more research is required to better establish *how* people are immobile,
100 *where* they are ‘trapped’, *who* may end up immobile, and in *what* ways the immobility status
101 may influence people’s wellbeing (or what non-economic losses and damages immobile or
102 displaced people face). The storytelling sessions from this study will enable an analysis of how
103 wellbeing losses were experienced by people displaced from Bhole Slum and reveal whether
104 these experiences subsequently fed into their displacement or immobility experiences.

³ In this article, *Trapped Populations* or *Non-Economic Loss and Damage* (in capital letters) are used to refer to the concepts (noun); *trapped* or *lost and damaged* (no capital letter) are used to refer to the verbs e.g. the action of being rendered immobile or an element being lost or damaged (verb); and finally, ‘*trapped*’ is used to refer to the adjective e.g. when a person is labelled as being thus, while ‘*lost*’ or ‘*damaged*’ is used to describe when a non-economic element is lost or damaged (adjective).

105 The Non-Economic Loss and Damage concept refers to climate-induced losses and
106 damages that cannot be traded in markets such as life, health and wellbeing, identity,
107 knowledge and belonging (UNFCCC 2013; Thomas and Benjamin 2019). In this study, Non-
108 Economic Loss and Damage will be used to frame the experiences that the immobile, ‘trapped’
109 or displaced people feel are impacting their wellbeing and (im)mobility status. The aftereffects
110 of human mobility and displacement often include a sense of lost belonging, identity, or social
111 cohesion, all which can have severe impacts on a person’s mental health and wellbeing. This
112 study contributes empirical evidence on these generally under accounted for aftereffects to
113 crucial climate policy tools that can help vulnerable populations in the future. The notions of
114 ‘trapped’ populations and non-economic loss are potentially useful as policy tools to identify
115 and protect those most vulnerable and exposed to environmental changes. People’s
116 vulnerability, often rooted in socio-economic and socio-normative inequalities, is assumed to
117 end up reducing their ability and adaptive capacity to respond to such changes. However, until
118 today, the ambivalent shape of the concepts has restricted their functionality. The potential
119 risks and consequences to identify ‘trapped’ people, and how to best provide support, are yet
120 unknown. This is partly founded in a lack of understanding of people’s experiences around
121 wellbeing loss.

122 Storytelling sessions, such as life histories, are well-established methodological
123 approaches within anthropology and cultural studies. In the field of climate change migration,
124 displacement and (im)mobility, however, storytelling investigations are only slowly emerging
125 (Ayeb-Karlsson et al. 2016, 2019, 2020; Singh and Basu 2019; Conway et al. 2019). The
126 storytelling methodology adopted by this study seeks to address a clear empirical gap by
127 placing people’s perceptions, values and meaning around climate-induced wellbeing, loss and
128 (im)mobility at the centre of the analysis.

129 **2. Method and study area**

130 Storytelling methodology is an open-ended narrative interviewing approach that gives people
131 the space to construct stories without unnecessary interruption. Leading or closed questions
132 should be avoided so that cultural and social values can be captured within the storylines
133 (Hodge et al. 2002; Kasper and Prior 2015). The methodology has been widely used to
134 empower vulnerable groups such as women, children, immigrants and medical patients
135 (Overcash 2003; Davis 2007; Rodriguez 2010). It is an effective way of ensuring the collection
136 of rich and informative data, and is well suited to Discourse Analysis (DA)⁴. People often say
137 one thing but do another. Practices or socio-normative behaviour are therefore better captured
138 in between the sentences, or through personal narratives and storylines. Personal narratives
139 allow the storyteller to choose what stories to tell, and whose reality to describe. A story is
140 never random, but represents a deeper meaning. It can give important insights in the inter-
141 social and subjective decision-making process. People use stories to position themselves, and
142 to justify their choices and behaviour. In this way, storytelling is a methodological window into
143 the subjective space (Pfahl and Wiessner 2007; Bell 2010; Ali 2013).

144 This article combines a diverse set of qualitative storytelling sessions, including
145 individual in-depth Livelihood History Interviews (LHI) and Key Experience Sessions (KES);
146 as well as focus group discussions involving Collective Storytelling Sessions (CSS) and a
147 Resettlement Choice Exercise (RCE) elaborating around people's aspirations and desires to
148 move or stay⁵. In total, 10 individuals contributed to 28 interview sessions, and 130 participants

⁴ In this article, discourse is understood as 'collectively shared domains of statements'. As discourses can interact, complement or compete with one another, we aim to broaden the linguistic analysis beyond one collective narrative, attitude or perception (see Foucault 1981 and Fairclough 2003).

⁵ Storytelling is an umbrella term that describes a methodological approach involving storytelling elements (as described in Pfahl and Wiessner 2007; Bell 2010; Ali 2013). The diverse methods used in this study, e.g. Livelihood History Interviews (LHI), Key Experience Sessions (KES), Collective Storytelling Sessions (CSS) and Resettlement Choice Exercise (RCE) are in this way all different storytelling methods. For more details on each and every method, as well as access to the questionnaires see Ayeb-Karlsson et al. 2016, 2020 and Ayeb-Karlsson 2018.

149 joined five group sessions. The first individual interview sessions involved two to three hour-
150 long sessions spread out over two to three days. Roughly six months to one year later follow
151 up interviews with the same informants were conducted and, with a few informants, a third set
152 of interviews were conducted two years later (e.g. 2014, 2015, and 2016). The process of
153 following up is an important element in the LHI and the KES approaches. First of all, trust is
154 established between the researcher and informants over time, allowing the storylines to be
155 extended and developed. Secondly, revisiting emotionally loaded experiences and events
156 during different days, at different times, and in different interview settings, has proven to be an
157 effective way of capturing different levels and nuances the same experience or event (this
158 builds upon Experience Sample Method, e.g. Koro-Ljungberg et al. 2008 and Csikszentmihalyi
159 and Larson 2014). Thirdly, it is important for the interview sessions to take the form of an
160 unstructured and ‘friendly’ conversation rather than a tick-box survey questionnaire or a yes-
161 and-no interview. By spreading out the interviews into two or three hour-long sessions over a
162 number of days the interruption to an informant’s daily routine or livelihood commitments is
163 also minimalised. It also prevents exhausting the informants. This approach brought about rich
164 and energetic storytelling sessions that developed further over time. The gender balance was
165 roughly 50/50, while livelihood, migration background, and socio-economic status reflected
166 the overall representation in the study site.

167 Respondent driven sampling (or snowball sampling) facilitated the selection process.
168 This is a non-probability sampling technique where existing participants recruit subsequent
169 respondents from among their acquaintances (Goodman 1961; Goel and Salganik 2010;
170 Heckathorn 2014). For this study, the initial group of respondents who formed the base of the
171 sample were selected from diverse backgrounds and included informants with varied migration
172 histories and different political, social, religious, livelihood, and ethnic backgrounds (Brace-
173 Govan 2004; Kurant et al. 2011).

174 During the early site visits and a transect walk it became clear that the settlement was
175 divided into strong political groups. The social division often related back to family histories,
176 migration period and origin villages back on Bhola Island, but it also reflected the livelihood
177 division, power status and neighbourhoods within the settlement. It was therefore crucial that
178 the initial sample included diverse social groups from which to capture these power hierarchies.
179 Clear power differences were identified between those who had; 1) migrated from the island
180 in the 1970s and first built the settlement, 2) migrated later on from the island, 3) been born to
181 parents who had migrated from the island (and divided according to their parents' migration
182 periods), and 4) migrated from other rural and urban areas. The final sample used by this study
183 included a balance of these four social groups. In addition to the decisions made around the
184 social inclusion criteria, efforts were made during the snowballing process to maintain a
185 balance between gender, livelihood and age. A sampling route was also decided upon before
186 arriving in the study site to ensure respondents from different neighbourhoods or geographical
187 parts of the slum were included (Heckathorn 2002; Browne 2005).

188 People first started migrating to Dhaka from Bhola Island after the devastating Cyclone
189 Bhola in 1970. As time passed, the settlers (many were living in shelters made from cardboard
190 boxes) found a suitable area and together built and named the settlement Bhola Slum after their
191 home island (see Fig. 1). Because Dhaka, then as well as now, struggled with lack of space,
192 the area was initially located in a lake (and the land under water). The settlers used waste and
193 soil to fill the lake and build pathways through the water. The houses were originally built on
194 bamboo pillars (similar to the housing used in many coastal areas). The area (still under water)
195 was then landfilled with waste that was covered by soil that the settlers purchased themselves.
196 In this way, the settlers 'made' their own land out of water. Bhola Slum still experiences a large
197 in and out flux of people from the island (and beyond). Most arriving from Bhola Island in
198 recent years have lost their land and home to riverbank erosion (McNamara et al. 2016; Ayeb-

199 Karlsson et al. 2016, 2020). The research site is in this sense interesting as it helps shed light
200 on people's experiences of longer-term displacement. The study allowed people to elaborate
201 upon their perceptions, feelings and sense of belonging in relation to the settlement and the
202 island. People's (im)mobility status was self-identified and its relation to their wellbeing
203 emerged in the storylines.

204 **3. Results**

205 Even though the Bhola Slum settlement was built by its habitants and named after their home
206 island, most people expressed a desire to leave. It would however be overly simplistic and
207 narrow to argue that they are all 'immobile'. The findings illustrated the risks and dangers of
208 describing someone as 'trapped', and reveal how wellbeing loss and (im)mobility are closely
209 interlinked. If immobility were framed as the problem that people are facing then the simple
210 solution would be to turn the immobile people mobile, or make the non-adaptive adapt. This
211 could turn climate policy interventions such as relocation or resettlement programs into risky
212 policy tools (Oliver-Smith 1991; Baldwin et al. 2016; Ayeb-Karlsson et al. 2018).

213 This study clearly portrays some of these dangers through the wellbeing lens. People's
214 stories outlined the nuances between their reasonings, emotions and experiences and the ways
215 they channelled into their mobility desires. This section is structured around the thematic areas
216 that emerged from the storytelling sessions that interlinked wellbeing loss and (im)mobility
217 status.

218 **3.1 Time, space and place**

219 Time, place and space played an important role in the narratives and explanations around what
220 people tried to escape from/to. People expressed a wish to return to their home villages (mostly
221 on Bhola Island). The city and the village were portrayed as binary opposites, where the village

222 was peaceful, safe and filled with life and food; a place where time passed by in pleasant
223 seconds, while the city was filled with dragged out years of dangers, conflict and hunger:

224 **Extract 1**

225 If we would have lived in village, our son would have grown up in a better environment than where he
226 is growing up now. He could ruin his life here because he may start mixing with the wrong crowd and
227 start socialising with ‘ruined’ children. Then he may start taking drugs because there are so many
228 opportunities to ruin your life in Dhaka city. In the village, there are no such options. In the village, there
229 is no tobacco, and there is no weed or drugs (LHI BSM70 2014).

230 **Extract 2**

231 We got the notice about five to fifteen days before the eviction. When they finally came here to remove
232 us, a conflict arose. The government officials came here with the police and physically tried to remove
233 us and started fighting the slum dwellers. We had a local political leader on our side. Her name is Dipty.
234 She is a member of the parliament now. She stood behind us and supported us in our protest. However,
235 the police still came here, she was arrested, and thrown in jail. The prime minister released her later on.
236 Two people in the settlement were severely beaten by the police (LHI BSM70 2014).

237 **Extract 3**

238 In such a world, I would not have to face a thousand people every day. I would not even have to talk to
239 you. However, Allah has sent us into this world, and in this world we are still hungry. If the riverbank
240 erosion would not have happened, we would still have our land. We would be able to farm that land. We
241 would have nice houses and enough food for all of us to eat. Our kitchens would be full of rice. I would
242 be able to eat whenever I wanted to. We came to Dhaka because we were starving. Those who managed
243 to make a living here can buy food, but for me Dhaka is still a place of hunger (LHI BSF40 2014).

244 Bhola Island was portrayed as home by the informants. It was narrated as a place where people
245 belonged, and where people wanted to be buried once they died. In some storylines, such as
246 those described by a middle-aged woman whose parents migrated from the island, the village
247 even became a place people belonged to although they were born in Dhaka after their parents’
248 arrival:

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⁶ The term ‘binary opposites’ in this article refers to a situation where a pair (words, things or characteristics such as man-woman, body-soul, black-white, east-west, and rural-urban) are defined against one and another. The system was seen as a fundamental organiser of all languages and thoughts.

250 **Extract 4**
251 I told my children that when I become unable to move by myself, or when I get so sick that I cannot
252 move, then I should be taken back home to my village. I want to die there, and I want my grave to be
253 located in my village (KES BSF43 2016).

254 **Extract 5**
255 We lived so much better. We would grow rice and we had a large house surrounded by trees. We were a
256 happy family with plenty of crops and land, but then it all went into the river. /.../ I say [I am from]
257 Bhola. I am from Bhola. That is where I come from. /.../ Home is Bhola. If someone asks me where my
258 house is located, I say Dhaka. Then I say that it is located at the slope of Pallabi, but if someone asks me
259 about my home, I say Bhola (LHI BSF40 2014).

260 Similar nostalgic storylines are common in diaspora settlements (Spivak 1996; Schein 1999;
261 Brubaker 2005). Studies have shown that migrant children, or second and third generations of
262 migrants, sometimes perceive their identity to be more strongly attached to their ‘homeland’
263 than their parents. The children feel a strong sense of belonging even though they themselves
264 did not migrate, but it was their parents who lived in and left the place (Anderson 1983; Butler
265 2001; Christou 2011).

266 Romanticism of the ‘homeland’ can be a way of finding a place in the displacement
267 (Lindqvist 1991; Cohen 2008). It is a way to create certainty in an uncertain living situation,
268 or a more stable identity than the one that is socially placed upon you (such as migrants, settlers,
269 newcomers). The narration or idea of what life would have been like if they had stayed was
270 shaped by this romanticism throughout the storytelling sessions. The same woman who
271 describes the house surrounded by trees and crops, and a kitchen filled with rice continues:

272 **Extract 6**
273 [When we moved to Dhaka] my father could not work as he was too old. My brother therefore supported
274 us economically. /.../ After he died, my parents suffered a great deal and I had to start begging. Go from
275 door to door. /.../ [If we would have stayed] I would have been able to take care of my health. We would
276 have our land to cultivate so our living conditions would be better. We used to have our own land so we
277 did not have to run after people. The way of living there was good (LHI BSF40 2014).

278 Romanticism plays another important function. A person who ends up being mentally or
279 psychologically ‘trapped’ may not necessarily experience it as a prison. As pointed out in
280 several storytelling sessions, for many the move to Dhaka did not turn out the way people had
281 hoped. There is therefore a similar risk that the return to Bhola Island would end up being a

282 disappointment. Staying in a place where you know the struggles can feel safer than to move
283 to a place where the hurdles are unknown. It may feel safer to know than not know. Certainty
284 is better than uncertainty.

285 Uncertainty can however also provide people with a feeling of safety. People do not
286 know what life would have been like if they had stayed on the island. Life on the island may
287 have become just as miserable as in Dhaka. This ignorance allows people to enjoy the nostalgia.
288 The idea of life being better on Bhola Island is something to hold onto. This warm memory
289 offered people a way to cope with their Dhaka lives. The village memory is most likely better
290 than ‘real life’ on the island. Returning to Bhola Island would challenge that nostalgia, and put
291 that collective memory at risk. In one’s mind, the idea of what life could be like remains the
292 same. However, trying to turn it into reality by returning would be to risk losing it. It is safer
293 to hold onto the idea or maintain the collective memory by never allowing it to materialise.

294 As illustrated, many of the storytelling sessions described aspirations, desires and even
295 a few attempts to return to the island. In most of the stories, the idea of returning did not evolve
296 beyond aspirations and desires; people never successfully moved back. In a few interviews,
297 people described going back to the island to visit family members. This is an important
298 observation as it proves that the return was not simply limited by financial or practical
299 elements. Some even returned to the island for some time with the intent to move back, but
300 ended up returning to Dhaka for emotional reasons – the move back to the island did not feel
301 right.

302 The interactions between material or economic and non-economic losses upon
303 someone’s wellbeing and immobility status must be acknowledged. It certainly matters in
304 relation to someone’s exposure and resilience or ability to bounce back. The diversity of
305 people’s displacement situations, or immobility statuses, and their link to wellbeing loss often
306 fed into the material and non-material losses they had experienced back on the island. For

307 example, a person who left the island after losing their home in a cyclone strike would be in a
308 potentially different immobility and wellbeing situation than a person who lost their home and
309 land to riverbank erosion. While some people living in Bhola Slum had family members
310 remaining on the island to whom they could one day return, others did not. To give another
311 example, people who lived further away from the coast on Bhola Island at times only sent one
312 child or family member to Bhola Slum for remittances. In Dhaka, the child (often adolescent
313 girls and boys) could work in the garment factories and send the money back to their parents
314 on the island. Meanwhile, those living closer to the coast more often migrated as a household
315 as the erosion directly impacted their homes and land. This difference also influenced their
316 storylines. The narratives of those who felt as if they had lost their whole world through the
317 erosion were often darker, and their immobility status was described as more permanent and
318 unchangeable.

319 One key word mentioned in most sessions was *opportunity*, as in ‘*if I get the*
320 *opportunity to move, leave, go home, I would*’. Another key element was *time*, as in ‘*time is*
321 *not right, but when time is right I will go*’, or ‘*when I have saved up enough money I will*
322 *return*’, or even ‘*when the erosion slows down I will go back home*’. Time also became a key
323 concept in terms of who held the knowledge, who should be listened to in the slum, and who
324 was settled or stable:

325 **Extract 7**

326 Those who have been here longer. They are the ones who knows best or who will be able to give you
327 correct information about the slum (KES BSF43 2016).

328 **Extract 8**

329 Generally, when people come to the city they need time to settle down. This takes about ten to twelve
330 years. People who are already living in the slum have more stability and order than the newcomers (CSS
331 BSF 2016).

332 Those who were listened to, or who had the knowledge, turned into the ones with the decision-
333 making and financial power in the settlement. This was reflected in the circumstances of those
334 who had lived in the settlement the longest. The 1970 founders, and sometimes even the 1980

335 migration group, for example, often did not pay rent. Several of these households also reported
336 tending to livelihoods inhabiting power, such as security guards, NGO coordinators and project
337 managers responsible for the arriving funds or even electricians. As Bhola Slum is an informal
338 settlement, those in control of the electricity supply were in a position of power.

339 **3.2 Gender, power and social roles**

340 Power relations and social hierarchies can be important contributing factors to someone's
341 immobility and wellbeing. The storytelling analysis, for example, showed that women and men
342 did not have the same opportunities within the settlement. The discursive rules, religious norms
343 and the expected discursive social behaviour⁷ were different for women and men, or for
344 unmarried and married women. The Collective Storytelling Sessions (CSS) proved to be useful
345 to identify these socio-cultural values, rules and norms. It was, for example, registered in both
346 the female and male CSS that the move to the city implied a normative shift for women,
347 especially those who were unmarried. This shift at times resulted in women 'forgetting' to
348 cover up, or to follow their religious devotions once arriving in the city. In Dhaka, women
349 generally have more liberty over their choices; whether or not to wear a headscarf, to move
350 around independently outside of the household, and to interact socially beyond the circle of
351 relatives and family. For these people the move to Bhola Slum opened up a new space of
352 decision-making power. However, for those who followed the social norms of the collective
353 group the restrictions upon liberties were in some ways even stricter in the slum. Unmarried
354 women in particular reported feeling more constrained as the risk of facing social stigma and
355 punishment, or losing 'honour', became higher with the change of social environment and
356 cultural shock:

⁷ 'Discursive behaviour' here refers to the normative behaviour reproduced within a discourse and therefore 'expected' of a person by its social surrounding. The rules and norms may vary depending on the social role of the person (Foucault 1981; Butler 2011).

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Extract 9

I think that the environment of the village is more conservative than in the city environment in our country. A girl can get more freedom by studying, as she can then move around more freely. There is less suspicion around a girl's behaviour and freedom in the city (CSS BSF 2016).

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Extract 10

It is very rare for a girl to go to Dhaka alone. One girl in a hundred perhaps goes alone. What generally happens is that after some time her character changes. She ends up marrying someone and forgets about her family. If a girl moves to Dhaka for work she should keep in mind that she has to send money to her parents, and that she must wait to marry until her parents want her to do so. If she forgets this and gets into a relationship with a man, marries him and starts a new family, she may suffer in the long run. Girls often meet men in the garment factories and start a relationship, but the husband may leave her even after she has had his child. This is the punishment for marrying someone without knowing enough about him. The first six months or so the husband may behave well, but then, what generally happens is that he changes. It is the girl then who has to suffer. In this situation, she can no longer go back home to her parents - she will have to work to provide and care for his child. She will have to work alone to support herself and her child. Perhaps she keeps her child somewhere under a tree while she works, and when the child cries she comes running to calm her down. That is what her life has become, miserable. If she only would have listened to what her parents said and kept to her work, she would not have to face such a reality. Though she only cared about herself and ended up ruining her life instead. /.../A man can surely get married again, even a girl if she is a dreamer. She could get married to another man too. Though it is the child who suffers the most in this kind of situation. A mother can re-marry with the child, or she can leave the child behind. /.../ The mother got another husband, the father got another wife, but what is there for the child? What did she get out of all this? Shame and hatred! This is why the child suffers the most (CSS BSM 2016).

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In many areas of rural Bangladesh men are responsible for the income and for providing for the household. Meanwhile, women are responsible for the home and for food preparation. This has resulted in men working outside the house, while women's duties take place within the home. Therefore, when women step out of the house to work in the village, or migrate to Dhaka to work in the garment factories, they transgress the social order. Chaos can arise from crossing the limits of the socially agreed space and place. This could be why those women who took up work outside the house were portrayed as dishonourable and were socially punished for breaking the discursive norm. This social stigma keeps the walls of the discourse from crumbling. The girl described in the male CSS above (Extract 10), changed her character after arriving in the city. She married a boy that she met in the garment factory, got pregnant, and was thereafter abandoned. In the story, she and her child ended up stigmatised, and were forever doomed to a life of suffering, shame and hatred. The woman could try to escape the

393 stigma by re-marrying another man. There was, however, no escape for the child who may
394 even be left behind.

395 In the storytelling interactions with women and their children in similar positions, who
396 were abandoned by their husbands and fathers, they describe how this experience is the root
397 cause of their immobility and lost wellbeing. A middle-aged woman and her twenty year old
398 son, for example, narrated how they desired to return to the island, but had been paralysed or
399 trapped into a bad cycle due to such a life event:

400 **Extract 11**

401 If there was any chance to live a better life where my children had the opportunity to work, then I would
402 go back to the village [on Bhola Island]. However, I was left by my husband, and then I got sick. I do
403 not have any hope left for my future. /.../ Life was good until my husband got re-married. My husband
404 used to treat me well. I was very happy until he married again. /.../ It is unbearable to utter the words of
405 my miserable story to you. I never want to speak of them. My husband married three other women besides
406 me. You cannot do anything to relieve my sadness or misery. Only Allah can help me (KES BSF43
407 2016).

408 **Extract 12**

409 Life on Bhola Island is more peaceful. I think that it is better. I have lived in Dhaka for more than ten
410 years now, but I do not like it here. Dhaka is not my place. I want to go back. I want to live in my village.
411 For me life is better there. The village environment is way better than the environment here. In the village
412 you do not realise when six months have passed, but here it is difficult to pass each and every day (KES
413 BSM20 2016).

414 The urban risks around 'bad' behaviour described in the storytelling sessions often
415 related to drugs for men and pregnancies for women. The different responsibility over children
416 for women and for men was also captured in the individual interviews. The responsibilities did
417 not end at feeding and supporting the children. If they turn out to be 'dishonourable' in the
418 future then it is a reflection of how the childcare duties were carried out:

419 **Extract 13**

420 After arriving in Dhaka, he did not find any work and got involved with drugs. He gradually went into
421 debt to be able to buy more drugs. /.../ He had to go back to the village to take care of his children. After
422 coming to Dhaka, he chose the wrong path and got addicted to drugs. He feared that his children might
423 get involved with drugs too [if they came to Dhaka]. He did not want for his children to go down the
424 same path that he did (CSS BSM 2016).

425 **Extract 14**

426 A father can leave his children, but a mother can never leave her child. I had hoped that my children
427 would help me in my future days. I was very sad when I found out that my children neglected these
428 duties. I have no stable happiness in my life. I was forced to nourish them poorly, so now they are not
429 that sound either (KES BSF43 2016).

430 Women reported rarely having the decision-making power in the household. In any registered
431 situation where a female informant did hold such power, the position was described as handed
432 over to them, permanently or temporary, due to unfortunate circumstances (such as the
433 husband's illness, abandonment or death). In the storytelling interviews, several female
434 respondents linked their health issues to adolescent pregnancies.

435 The sessions also described gender roles, such as who was the 'natural' decision-maker.
436 A woman in her forties, for example, told the story of how she was taken to the hospital to be
437 examined by a female doctor. However, the doctor sent her home and told her that her husband
438 needed to come and see her to receive the diagnosis. Neither her doctor nor her husband notified
439 her about her health condition. She eventually got her diagnosis but at first the knowledge, and
440 the decision of how to deal with the information and whether to seek treatment, was placed
441 fully in her husband's hands:

442 **Extract 15**

443 I got married when I was twelve years old. A few years later I gave birth to my first son. I faced a lot of
444 problems giving birth to him. /.../ A woman from work was a doctor so she took me to Dhaka Medical
445 Hospital. There they did some tests and noticed that my kidneys were failing. She gave me an injection
446 and told me that I had to go home and ask my husband to meet with her. Then she gave me some pills
447 and sent me home. I told my husband that he should go and meet with her. She was the one who notified
448 my husband about my kidney failure, but she never told me what was wrong. My husband looked worried
449 when he returned home so I tried to find out why, but he never told me what was wrong. He just started
450 to work really hard, saved up money, and even took out a loan. The family I worked for at the time also
451 gave us some money. /.../ At one point when I was sick and he could not do enough, he even thought of
452 selling his blood, but I warned him not to do so. He does not have that much blood so he would surely
453 have died. If we are both dead then who would look after our children? (LHI BSF40 2014).

454 **3.3 Health, emotions and wellbeing**

455 All the conducted Livelihood History Interviews (LHI) captured health issues and
456 complications. The inescapable link between poverty and ill-health was described in the
457 interviews as akin to being 'trapped into a bad cycle':

458 **Extract 16**

459 My husband cannot work properly as he had an accident. He was cutting mud on a hill and got struck by
460 a sudden landslide. There was a pipe inside the hill and it broke creating the landslide, and he fell down
461 in a hole and was buried. His fellow co-workers removed the mud and managed to save him. They took
462 my husband to the hospital. Now, whenever he tries to work, he faces many problems. He is in pain

463 coming from both sides of his belly, and sometimes when he coughs, blood comes out of his mouth (LHI
464 BSF40 2014).

465 **Extract 17**

466 After my wife got sick I could not manage to save up any money. She needs her medicine everyday
467 which is about 250taka [£2.50]. I cannot work due to my health issues so how am I supposed to feed her?
468 I had to ask people I know for money, and an NGO lent me about 30,000taka [£300]. The money I
469 borrowed from people I will have to pay back with interest. If the loan would be 2000taka then I need to
470 pay back 2800taka. So the interest is 800taka. Only 10,000taka out of the 30,000taka was from the NGO.
471 I cannot work so I cannot pay back my debt. I do what I can, but I only manage to pay the interest (LHI
472 BSM60 2014).

473 The stories illustrated how people's life situations after arriving in the city easily turned into a
474 downward spiral. To start with, the newcomers ended up in dangerous working and living
475 conditions that increased the risk of getting injured or sick, and negatively damaged or eroded
476 their wellbeing. After getting sick or injured, many (women as well as men) did not manage to
477 retain their livelihoods. The subsequent lack of financial resources turned into a lack of food
478 and medicine that worsened the illness. Additionally, people sometimes ended up with costly
479 hospital bills or medicine that they only could afford by taking out high interest loans. A lack
480 of financial means was portrayed by most as something preventing them from moving. Not
481 being able to tend to a livelihood or carry out household duties also affected people emotionally
482 and ended up damaging their wellbeing. Men described how they felt that they were failing
483 their families when they were too sick to work or provide for them financially. Meanwhile, as
484 the women left their household duties for work they had similar feelings around not spending
485 enough time looking after the children, cooking and cleaning. It is clearly of great importance
486 therefore to dig deeper into the roots of poverty and social inequalities to fully understand their
487 nature and implications. The financial constraints placed upon the households described above
488 ended up damaging people's wellbeing in diverse ways.

489 Crucial non-economic elements, such as mental health and wellbeing, are often
490 neglected in much of the literature on 'trapped' populations. Yet, the narratives around loss of
491 honour, damaged or poor health, gender roles and social stigmas, were prominent in the
492 storytelling sessions. A middle-aged woman felt the need to explain the unexplainable. Even

493 though her doctor was unable to determine what disease she and her daughter had, she was
494 certain that they got it from working as housemaids in other people's houses:

495 **Extract 18**

496 I do not know what disease my daughter has. Not even the doctor was able to understand what kind of
497 sickness it is. She has fevers, but it does not show all the time. We got sick from doing household work
498 in other people's houses. That is how we got the disease (LHI BSF40 2014).

499 The storytelling sessions also captured the loss of mental health and wellbeing in other ways.
500 The hopelessness, and the emotional numbness that the hopelessness created around the future,
501 was expressed in several of the collective, as well as the individual, interviews. The village and
502 city were once again described as dichotomous, where happiness, dreams and wellbeing were
503 lost in the erosion and subsequent move:

504 **Extract 19**

505 Wellbeing to me is all about living a peaceful life. That is why I want to go back to Bhola Island (KES
506 BSM20 2016).

507 **Extract 20**

508 When we were children we had dreams of what we would become, but our land suddenly went into the
509 river due to the erosion and we had to come to Dhaka to survive (CSS BSM 2016).

510 Another similar description was around the feelings of safety, or lack thereof, such as '*this*
511 *place is very unsafe*', or '*the island was safer*'. The importance of feeling safe, moving safely,
512 and to a safe place, were emphasised in the stories and must be understood as another bridging
513 element between (im)mobility and wellbeing:

514 **Extract 21**

515 We would prefer to move together as a group instead of individually. This would make us feel safer and
516 more comfortable about the move (RCE BSF 2014).

517 **Extract 22**

518 The slum provides us with no safety or security in terms of not knowing whether we can stay. The
519 government owns the land, and they can evict us anytime. We would like to go to a safe place (RCE
520 BSM 2014).

521 Wellbeing played a crucial role in people's (im)mobility decision-making process - whether to
522 stay or go. Women and men expressed a need to feel safe and comfortable. This was
523 highlighted in the narratives around what an optimal resettlement or relocation process would
524 include. Women expressed a desire to move together as a group to help them feel safer during,

525 and more comfortable about, the move. In this way, although the physical environment changed
526 the social environment would remain the same.

527 **4. Non-economic wellbeing loss and damage and (im)mobility decision-** 528 **making**

529 The storytelling sessions carried out in Bhola Slum provide climate policy-makers with rich
530 empirical evidence on *what* non-economic losses people may experience after a climate-
531 induced move and, crucially, *how* these losses affect people's wellbeing and (im)mobility
532 status. The findings also illustrate what can be done to avert, minimise and address these losses
533 (UNFCCC 2013, 2015). The narratives identified non-economic losses that have received little
534 attention within a climate policy context, such as the loss of honour. The storylines also
535 identified groups who were particularly vulnerable due to existing social inequalities and power
536 relations, such as unmarried women and abandoned children.

537 An important outcome of this study is the way in which it delicately revealed the
538 complex interactions between human mobility, displacement, wellbeing and immobility. For
539 practical reasons, climate policy and climate action often simplify and exclude these
540 interconnections. A person is deemed to be mobile, displaced or immobile. A suggestion put
541 forward was to differentiate human mobility and displacement through volition – voluntary
542 and involuntary or forced movements. However, several migration scholars have elaborated
543 around the risks associated with such a conceptual division (Black et al. 2013; Baldwin 2016;
544 Ayeb-Karlsson et al. 2018, 2020). It is, for example, not clear who has the power to decide
545 whether a movement is voluntary, nor to determine what push factor forced a person to move
546 (or not). The structural organisation of the classification of a person as mobile, displaced, or
547 immobile also excludes the potential for one person to be associated with more than one
548 (im)mobility trait. In this case study, several informants in Bhola Slum moved from/to
549 mobility, displacement and immobility. We heard the life stories of people *moving* from Bhola

550 Island to Dhaka, ending up *displaced* in Dhaka (many of them building temporary shelters
551 from cardboard boxes), and finally finding themselves *immobile* in Bholra Slum and desiring to
552 return back home.

553 The study also demonstrated that (im)mobility decision-making is highly complex, and
554 that mobility aspirations and desires do not necessarily lead to movements. A person's feelings,
555 emotions (linked to wellbeing) and social discourse strongly influenced their decision-making
556 process and its eventual outcomes. In an attempt to outline the interactions between wellbeing
557 and (im)mobility decision-making, discourse, power and knowledge are useful concepts (see
558 Fig. 2). Knowledge and power may influence and limit people's decision-making process
559 through their discursive reality. This is because people actively construct social norms, rules
560 and boundaries through communicative language. In similar ways, behaviour, practices and
561 body language, as well as people's observations and reflections around the actions of a
562 collective group, also create and reproduce social discourses (Foucault 1981, 1995, 2002;
563 Fairclough 2003).

564 The reasons behind someone's immobility, or why a person may end up 'trapped', is
565 never straightforward. In the proposed *discursive decision-making model*, a decision is not seen
566 as an event going immediately from intention to action or behaviour, but as part of a longer
567 decision-making process including several steps such as intention, aspiration, desire, action,
568 behaviour, norm and value (see also Ayeb-Karlsson et al. 2020). Before an idea (intention,
569 aspiration, desire) turns into action (practise, behaviour, norm), it is perceived and socially
570 tested through communication, speech and stories. Emotions and feelings are passed though
571 all these decision-making layers, and help regulate, or channel people into normative thoughts,
572 decisions and behaviours. In this way, a decision is not a linear progression going from A to Z,

8 Here we acknowledge the difference between feelings and emotions; where *feelings* are experienced consciously, while *emotions* manifest either consciously or subconsciously.

573 but a process within which people may move backwards and forwards, and may turn away
574 from instigating an action, and return to an aspirational state. This is likely to be regulated by
575 feelings and emotions taking place when elaborating upon or testing the ‘decision’ socially.
576 Ultimately, as people are locked into social discourses their decisions are discursively regulated
577 by power (punishment) and knowledge (discipline). These regulations interactively take place
578 on a collective and subjective level. People, for example, discipline their desires and intentions
579 according to the knowledge of what is socially accepted, or they may become the recipients of
580 social punishment for behaving in a way that is outside of the discursive norm or pursuing an
581 unaccepted behaviour in a place.

582 The practical function of this conceptual decision-making model is based on the
583 empirical findings. We observed, for example, in the thematic area of *time, space and place*,
584 how socio-psychological processes, or wellbeing loss and damage, were just as important
585 immobility factors as financial means. In some of the narratives, people expressed not having
586 adequate funds to move back, but in others people described how their mental wellbeing, or
587 feelings and emotions, restrained their movement. People in a way ended up mentally
588 paralysed, ‘trapped’ in the prison of the mind. This was, for example, observed in the storylines
589 that described the collective memory of life on Bhola Island, or the imagined island life. This
590 psychological immobility seemed to constrain people from realising the return move. People
591 did not move back, although they desired, hoped, discussed, planned and at times even
592 managed to save up enough money to go back. The desire and aspiration to return home was
593 present but the decision, action and actual move had to ‘wait until things were right’.

594 The thematic area *gender, power and social roles* also illustrated how social
595 punishment and stigma can limit or constrain a person’s decision-making process. Women
596 (often unmarried younger women) and abandoned children were described as being punished,
597 regulated and controlled by societal norms. ‘Honour’ played a key role in this process, where

598 it became evident that women and children generally did not have the same liberty to decide
599 upon their movements as men. Some of the women and children described how specific
600 socially stigmatising events (such as being abandoned by their husbands and fathers) prevented
601 them from returning to Bhola Island. Stigma could extend from a fathers' behaviour or
602 abandonment to an abandoned mother and their child. The mother may even leave behind the
603 child behind so that she can re-marry. This child would then face a lifetime of social
604 discrimination and punishment.

605 (Im)mobility decision-making and wellbeing are important elements in a climate policy
606 context. The storytelling sessions in this study have illustrated how a long line of non-economic
607 losses and damages affected people's wellbeing and (im)mobility status. Top-down planned
608 mobility programs, such as resettlement, relocation and assisted migration, must therefore be
609 approached with extreme care (Oliver-Smith 1991; de Sherbinin et al. 2011). We need more
610 empirical investigations of peoples' mental health and wellbeing losses in relation to climate-
611 induced (im)mobility. Loss of honour, health, life, identity, place of belonging, and social
612 value, were prominent in the narratives. We know from existing mental health studies that such
613 losses can have severe and lifelong impacts on a person's wellbeing. Mental ill-health,
614 disorders and trauma require effective and sustainable treatment plans. Immediate attention
615 directed towards these issue by climate policy-makers, practical and financial stakeholders
616 must be on top of the agenda.

617 **5. Conclusion**

618 The storytelling sessions shed light on how climate-induced non-economic losses and damages
619 experienced by Internally Displaced People impacted their wellbeing and immobility status.
620 The methodology proved useful in providing details around the socio-psychological, cultural
621 and subjective values that enhanced and restricted people's (im)mobility and wellbeing. The
622 sorts of empirical insights offered by this study are usually difficult to capture through the more

623 commonly used binary structured methodologies such as survey questionnaires. The
624 unstructured and open format of the storytelling sessions allowed people to lead, change
625 direction and guide the research narratives. In this way, the sessions reduce researcher bias and
626 help capture unfamiliar values, perceptions and behaviours.

627 The study outlined a long line of climate-induced non-economic losses, as well as their
628 (im)mobility and wellbeing impacts. The study does not propose that material or economic
629 losses do not impact people's wellbeing but argues that they must be afforded equal attention.
630 Compared to the sizeable body of literature on the economic losses associated with climate
631 change, we are currently seeing far fewer studies that focus on the equivalent non-economic
632 losses and damages. The storylines illustrated the dangers of lapsing into a linear thought
633 processes where immobility is framed as a simple problem with mobility as the simple solution.
634 (Im)mobility decision-making is a delicate socio-psychological process strongly linked to
635 people's mental health and wellbeing. Therefore, structural movements of people may easily
636 cause harm and erode wellbeing, agency and dignity. We need more and better insights into
637 the support systems in place for migrants upon arrival to better understand their weaknesses
638 and strengths. This goes beyond providing people with basic services, or practical and financial
639 support. For example, mental health support for environmental migrants is rarely spoken of,
640 despite it being standard protocol for refugees facing conflict and persecution. We need further
641 research on the impacts and experiences of people who have migrated, relocated, resettled, and
642 returned, as well as longer-term in-depth investigations in diaspora settlements. The close
643 alignment of wellbeing and (im)mobility is worthy of caution. We must ask ourselves whether
644 mobility is *the* solution for a displaced or immobile group; a solution for whom and by whom.

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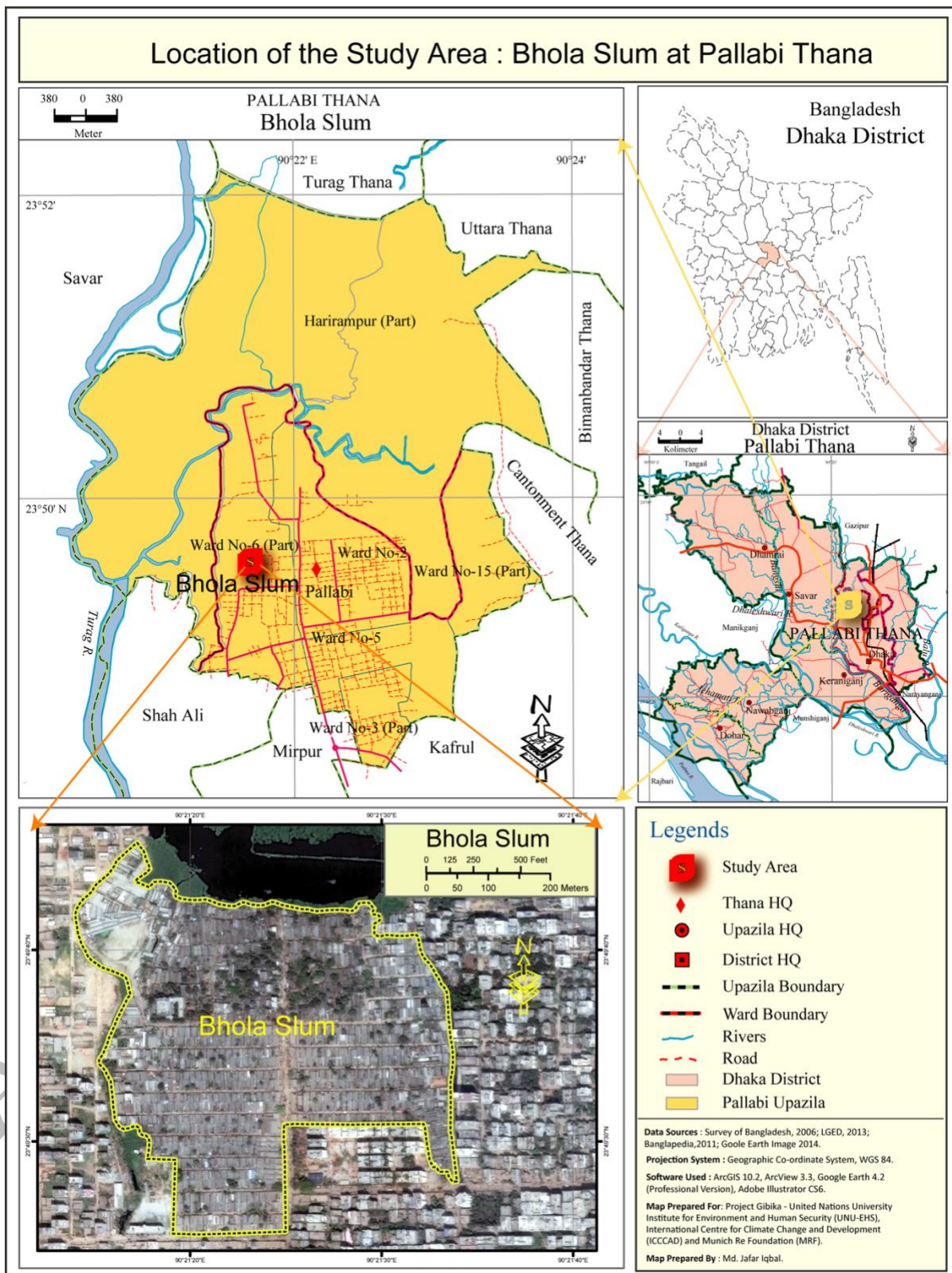
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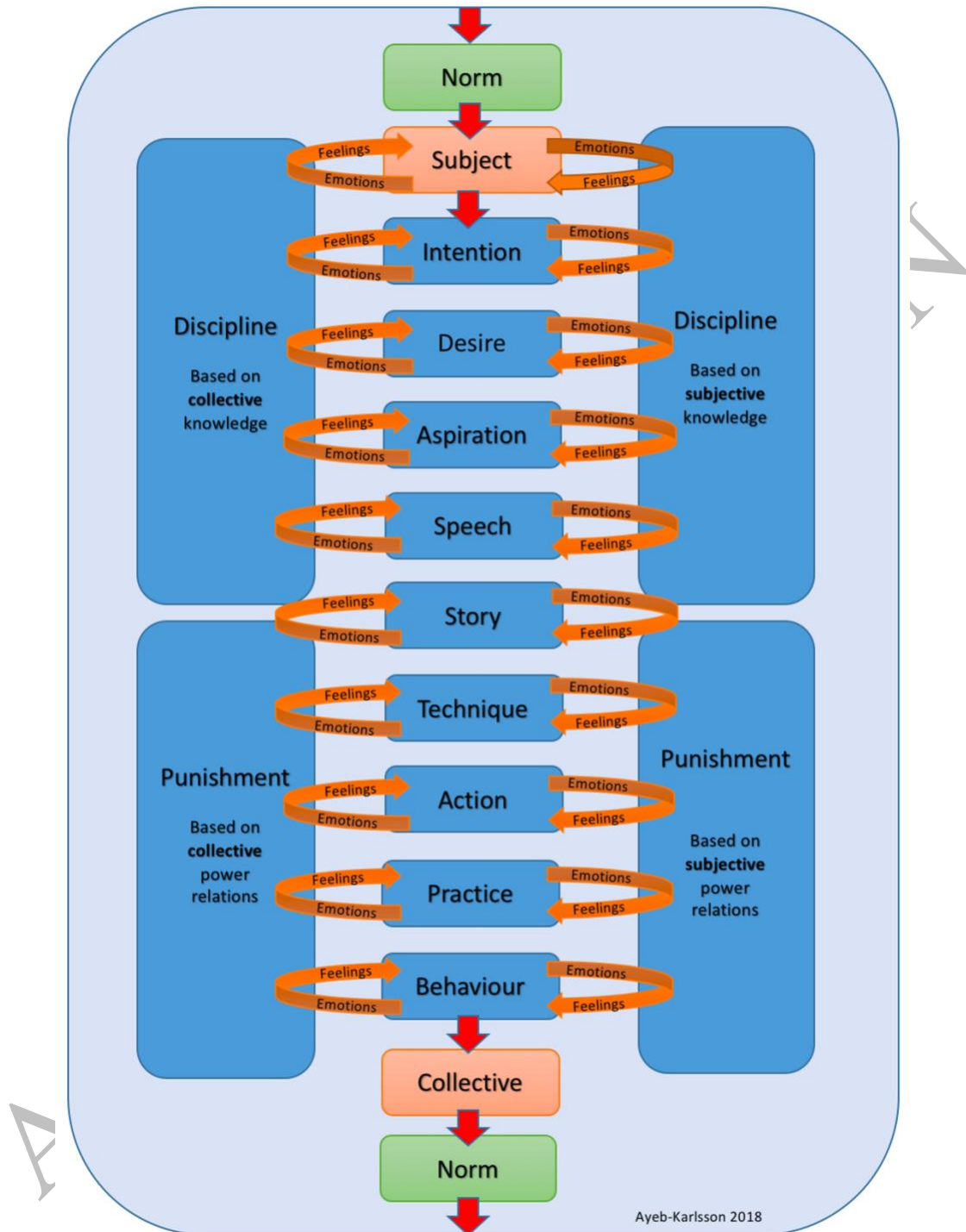
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Fig. 1 Map of Bhola Slum's location in Dhaka, Bangladesh



813 **Fig. 1** The map indicates Bhola Slum's location in Dhaka, as well as Dhaka's location in Bangladesh.
 814 As visible on the map, Bhola Slum extends into a wet area from which the settlement was first built
 815 using garbage and soil as landfill (Md. Jatar Iqbal 2016).

Fig. 2 Discursive decision-making model



818 **Fig. 2** The figure illustrates a conceptual idea of how people’s decision-making process is constrained
 819 and enabled by discursive and social-norms through the interaction of power (through punishment),
 820 knowledge (through discipline), feelings and emotions, and in this sense strongly aligned with a
 821 person’s wellbeing (Ayebe-Karlsson et al. 2020:3).