



Choosing a Life: Remittances and Youth Aspirations in Bangladeshi Villages

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MOOP project RP14 Intra Household Dynamics: Gendered Practices of Remittance Use and the Shaping of Youth Aspirations: A Case Study of Bangladesh

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Abstract

Remittances are special forms of economic exchange which can be transformed into or invested in order to build other forms of tangible and intangible resources. The immediate spending of remittances in smoothing household consumption, education, land and other property has long-term economic, social and generational impacts which impact youths' aspirations and their opportunities to realise their aspirations. In its effort to establish a causal relationship between youth aspirations and remittances based on in-depth qualitative study, the paper considers the complex ways in which remittances help rural Bangladeshi youths to project their future with regard to education, work and migration whilst continuing to experience constraints and opportunities in terms of their class, gender and generation.

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Executive Summary

This paper discusses the effect of international migration on left-behind youths' ideas of what a good future involves. Both theoretical and empirical literature abound with analyses of how migration and remittances impact on left behind children and youths in terms of family relationships, education, employment and the propensity to migrate. This paper takes a step further and explores the meaning and construction of youth aspirations, and the ways in which remittances impact differently on male and female youths' aspirations.

Conceptually, the paper draws on Appadurai's (2004) theorisation of the capacity to aspire, which posits that aspirations are relatively evenly distributed. Yet, because they are located in an uneven terrain, where the availability of information and people's social, cultural and economic experiences differ, people do not have the same capacity to imagine feasible pathways towards the future they desire. Further, the paper employs feminist approaches to unpack intra-household dynamics and pay attention to how cultural norms, social relations and economic means impact on what is considered desirable and feasible for female and male youths. Through the analysis of information availability, experience and the ways in which cultural and socio-economic dimensions can be enabling and constraining, the paper examines how remittances create opportunity spaces for youth for pursuing particular pathways.

The analysis focuses on how remittances create opportunity spaces for youths in three areas: education, occupation and migration. The study shows that once consumption needs are met, remittances are used to secure property in terms of land or housing and to educate the next generation. Education is seen as a ladder to upward social mobility and youths, irrespective of their age, gender and class, aspired to complete higher secondary school. Further education, in contrast, is less desired to because it is often unavailable, expensive and beyond their means, or the youths are under pressure 'to be established' before the remittances cease to flow.

Remittances are crucial for being able to invest in education but youths' opportunity space for pursuing education is influenced by a number of other factors. The cultural construction of 'education' and the balance between affordability and the desirability of jobs requiring higher education affect the opportunity space for individual youths. Additionally, ideas about when youth should make the transition to adulthood and 'be established' may impact on how long they remain in education. For male youths 'being established' means becoming a breadwinner, whereas for female youths it means marrying.

The pressure to 'being established' creates a difference between female and male youth, in that female youths marry much earlier. Remittances affect the marriage of female youths in several ways. First, remittances enable paying a higher dowry and thus having more choice in marriage partner but the concern that remittances will cease at one point may lead to an earlier marriage. Second, remittances may allow a marriage to fail because the parents can afford to support a divorced daughter and her child(ren). Remittances also affect male youths by extending the time before parents begin to demand of their sons to become established.

Youths' capacity to aspire to certain types of employment is circumscribed by the social construction of female and male positions. The expectations of married women to be care-givers and home makers restrict their opportunity space for pursuing an occupational career or migration. Male youths, on the other hand, are not restricted in the same way by their role as breadwinners. Their capacity to aspire is based on social constructions of government jobs, business potential and farming in Bangladesh and of international migration, information and experiences of hardship, failure and success to pursue different pathways. Government jobs are seen as the best while other occupations are perceived as stop-gap activities. Nevertheless, remittances are important in all realms; government jobs require the payment of 'speed money' (bribes) and possibly extra training, business requires capital, farming access to land, labour and inputs, and migration requires large sums of money to pay fees and transportation.

In spite of allowing youths to pursue other and more desired pathways, remittances are still central in the facilitation of male youths' migration. Not only is it easier to cover the costs, but having a migrant in the family is also important for choosing the destination and for approaching the right agents. Some male youths from non-migrant households access remittances and migrant knowledge through marriage. Migration then is the dowry.

This paper extends Appadurai's notion of the 'capacity to aspire' beyond the context of economic inequality by showing that gender and generational inequality may crucially impact on youths' capacity to aspire and that all youths do not benefit equally from the opportunity spaces created by remittances.

1. Introduction

A growing body of theoretical and empirical literature examines the impacts of migration and remittances on left behind children, adolescents and youths, and how these shape their aspirations in terms of migration, education, employment and family relationships (Wickramasekara 2013, Asis and Ruiz-Marave 2013, Meyerhoefer and Chen 2011, MacKenzie and Rapoport 2011). Some scholars argue that migrant remittances usually have a positive impact on human resource accumulation among the youth in the form of education attendance and attainment (Mansour et al 2011). Others, however, show lower schooling aspirations and higher migration aspirations among youths who have members abroad to facilitate their migration (McKenzie and Rapoport 2011). That remittances are converted into economic and social status, capital and wealth have also been covered widely in many anthropological accounts on Gulf migrants from South Asia (e.g. Gardner 1995, Rashid 2016 on Bangladesh, Osella and Osella 2000 on India, Gamburd 2000 on Sri Lanka and Lefebvre 1999 on Pakistan). There is, however, a general dearth of research on not only the meaning and construction of youth aspirations belonging to remittance receiving communities but also whether the enhanced socio-economic standing, attained social mobility and developed social relations through the use of remittances, in culturally specific ways help to create youths' 'map of a journey into the future' (Appadurai 2004: 76). This paper aims to fill this gap. Building on Appadurai's (2004) theorisation of aspiration as a cultural capacity and Sen's (1990) capability approaches, it explores how remittances affect the life choices of young people in rural communities with high rates of labour migration in Bangladesh.

Against existing studies' presentation of remittances' impact on the structure and welfare of households, e. g. its dominant role in generating household income, consumption and savings, thus replacing agriculture as a main source of livelihood (Toufique and Turton, 2003, Siddiqui, 2010 and Sikder, 2013) this paper stresses people's ability to manoeuvring resources through remittances and the activities in which they engage in this respect. Using a capability approach the paper investigates the distribution of opportunities available to youths to pursue their life trajectories in terms of education, occupation or migration. It argues that, while remittances perform functional activities to remove structural constraints such as poverty, the extent to which youths are capable of realising their aspirations depends on the distribution of opportunities to exercise their agency. This offers new insights into the remittance literature, that is dominated by productivist and welfare approaches which see remittances largely as a pillar of national economy, an instrument of development and a much needed resource for poor migrant households in Bangladesh (ibid).

Since 1976, 9.5 million people have migrated from Bangladesh to the Gulf and South East Asia to work in unskilled, semiskilled and skilled jobs. In 2015, Bangladesh received US\$15 billion as remittances, which are one of the most consistent sources of household earning in Bangladesh. Again, young people in Bangladesh comprise a significant proportion of the village population; with around 30% of the total population currently aged 10-24 years. In agrarian and remittance-dependent rural Bangladesh, young people usually pursue their livelihood in agriculture, petty business, salaried jobs, labour migration and so on (BRAC 2006a). Any inquiry about remittances' impact on youth aspirations against this background therefore raises the following questions: What do youths aspire to regarding their education, occupation and migration? How do remittances influence youth's capacity to aspire? In what ways do remittances have a different impact on

forming male and female youths' aspiration? The underlying assumption is that aspiration plays an important role in influencing how people make life choices and how they think and feel about themselves (Leavy and Smith 2010).

This study is of particular relevance for Bangladesh, because of its interlocking dimensions of class, gender and generational norms guiding men and women's lives. Women are seen as the bearer of prestige and honour of the family and community (Somaj) at large (see Mookherjee 2008). An ideal woman is one who is married, has children and is capable of taking care of all of the members of the household. She should provide care of the elderly members of the family, especially her husband's parents. Women's honour in rural Bangladesh lies in their capacity to reproduce and perform the care duties ascribed by the cultural norms as well as modesty (Kotalova 1993, Rozario 2001). Conversely, for a man, success and status lie in being a good provider, a powerful person within the kinship network and a patron in the community (Rashid 2016: 174). The idea of men as breadwinners and women as carers of the household makes overseas migration for employment a 'masculine' phenomenon in the villages (ibid). So it is unsurprising that young girls and boys face different life choices. As Del Franco (2010) observes, young girls' educational aspirations are closely intertwined with the centrality of getting married (Del Franco 2010). The value and meaning of education and marriage for young women in Bangladesh is located in the social embeddedness whereby individuals are bound by a complex web of social and hierarchical relationships (ibid, Kabeer 2000). Class' is another key principle that interacts with gender and shapes the choice and decision-making about education, work and migration (Heissler 2008). Girls and boys who belong to a higher class are more likely to be constrained to exploit the full range of choices and actions available to them, as their higher social position often serve to narrow their thinking and mindset (ibid).

The above implies that all members of the household do not equally capitalise on the spaces created by remittances and hence 'the map of the future' varies across genders, classes and generations. Studies unfold that men and women delicately negotiate their positions within a gendered and intergenerational hierarchy. While earlier research emphasised women's negotiations within the resistance and countervailing strategies employed in everyday life (Raheja and Gold 1994), recent scholarship notes women's docility (Mahmood 2005) and submission (Rashid 2013) as the preferred means of subjugating structural constraints. In a different genre, scholars also focus on intra-household bargaining (Agarwal 1997, Kabeer 2000) as important instruments of household decision-making. Thus, unfolding how gender, generation, class and other factors intersect while remittances foster the capacity of the youth to aspire to different life trajectories requires an analysis of the intra-household relations and decision making.

Like elsewhere, 'Youth' is a contested term in Bangladesh (BRAC 2006a). Although the United Nations sets an age bracket of 15 to 24 years for operational purposes, anthropologists and sociologists argue that, as a social category, 'youth' is historically constructed and culturally bounded (Thorsen 2006, 2009). Scholars argue that the meaning of 'youth' varies from one social setting to another and even from one person to another, depending on the economic, symbolic and ritual situations of society and the family at large (Thorsen 2006: 90, Durham 2004, Bucholtz 2002). In a family, the various members, such as the father, mother and children, may have different ideas about the kinds of work that are appropriate for the youths in question, depending on their gender,

position in the family and kinship networks (Whitehead et al 2007). Similarly, the community may associate youths with certain abilities linked with earning, marriage and establishing a household. In rural Bangladesh, youth is defined by age and occupation for boys and marital status for girls. Male youths in Bangladesh are those who are not yet married, such as college and university students, whereas unmarried girls, irrespective of their age, are usually considered 'youths' compared to their married or divorced counterparts. In analysing remittances' influence on youth aspiration, the paper will follow the above definition of 'youth'.

In the following sections the methodology and the setting of the study will be presented, followed by a section on the conceptual framework guiding the analysis. Drawing on case studies from the selected households, the following four sections will unfold the youths' capacity to aspire with regard to education, work and familial relations. The concluding section will summarise the findings.

2. Methodology

The paper is based on a qualitative study carried out in Bangladesh April-July 2015, involving both primary and secondary methods of data collection. Tangail- a migration-rich district in central Bangladesh, where the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU) conducted a global migration survey in 2014 - was selected for the study. The study villages are located in two (upazila) sub-districts of Tangail district, which is 104 kilometres northwest of Dhaka; namely, Kalihati and Tangail Sadar (Proper). Primary data for this study were collected through in-depth interviews with the responsible adults and youths from 24 households. In every household, at least an adult and a youth (in most cases, a son or daughter of that house) were interviewed. Additionally, people were also interviewed in the sub-sample of 10 households selected for follow up visits.

The study drew samples from the area to maintain the representativeness as well as to take advantage of the existing data. Overall, the sampling quota included both responsible adults and youths (aged 14 to 27). There were eight migrant, eight non-migrant and eight returnee migrant households among the total 24 households interviewed. During the sampling, attention was also paid to their socio-economic condition and the gender identity of the head.

Primary data for the study were also collected from six Focus Group Discussions (FGDS) with youths, school teachers and locally important persons i.e., members of the Union Parishad, local Non-Government Organisation (NGO) workers, school teachers and social workers. During all three stages of the field work, the team closely observed the activities, conversations and comments of the members of the households. Researchers spent time at schools, bazaars and roadsides, interacting with people and asking them about migration and the remittance dynamics in the research area. Informal chats with family members of all ages and both genders as well as with neighbours produced important insights into the research.

Among the 24 households studied, seven were joint families comprising the migrant worker and his wife and children, whereas the rest of the households were nuclear. All of the non-migrant households were nuclear, whereas there were nine nuclear families among the migrant and returnee households. There were 14 male headed and 10 female headed households. The average

size of the migrant households was 5.4 members, while that of the returnee migrant households was 4.4 and that of the non-migrant households was 3.5 members.

3. The Analytical Framework

Aspiration is explained by sociologists as the ability to set future goals while being 'inspired in the present to work towards these goals (Guzmán et al 2008: 3). This idea is rooted in social comparison theory which argues that people tend to compare themselves with others who possess similar beliefs and abilities. However, aspirations cannot be viewed solely as personal attributes under an individual's control. Rather, they are situated within and affected by particular opportunities, constraints and circumstances (Furlong and Biggart, 1999). Theories also suggest that aspirations develop within a set of constraints impacting on self-concepts, including gender stereotypes and personal perceptions of ability as well as the influence of the context of opportunities and the prestige that individuals associate with different outcomes (Gottfredson 1981, Armstrong and Crombie 2000:83). This is why high aspirations for an individual with particular life circumstances may be considered low aspirations for another individual with different circumstances (Gutman and Akerman, 2008: 3).

3.1 The Notion of 'Capacity to Aspire'

While, in economic analysis, aspirations are commonly associated with wants, preferences, choices and calculations, to Appadurai (2004: 76), the capacity to aspire involves the ability to read 'a map of a journey into the future'. In other words, unless we are supplied with the information and experiences required to envisage a pathway to the desired future, it remains elusive like a map covered in unfamiliar symbols that cannot be deciphered. According to Appadurai (2004), aspirations are relatively evenly held—having particular desires for the future is not exclusive to more affluent and powerful groups. However, the capacity to aspire, which is shaped by social, cultural and economic experiences, and the availability of navigational information, are not equally distributed. Exploring the notion of aspiration as a cultural capacity, rather than an individual trait, thus facilitates a consideration of the effects of the unequal distribution of social, cultural and economic capital on the capacity. Such an analysis is highly relevant in the Bangladeshi context.

The capacity of youths to aspire is shaped by how they perceive their position in the wider economy, and the resources available to enable the (re)imagination of their own future (Sanders and Munford 2008). As Appadurai (2004) points out, young people have uneven terrains of aspiration and different abilities to aspire, because inequalities exist in every society in terms of people's power, dignity and material resources. To him, wealthier people possess a more complex experience of the relationship between a wide range of ends and means - 'because they have a bigger stock of available experiences of the relationship of aspirations and outcomes... a better position to explore and harvest diverse experiences of exploration and trial ...[and] many opportunities to link material goods and immediate opportunities to more general and generic possibilities and options' (Ibid: 63) The imagining of 'a good life' is also embedded in an uneven landscape constrained by class and gender divides. Understanding youth aspirations in a given context, therefore, demands careful

examination of youths' capacity 'to explore and harvest diverse experiences of exploration and trial' and the opportunities available to them 'to link material goods and immediate opportunities to more general and generic possibilities and options' (ibid: 62).

A number of studies have used this approach to analyse youths' educational aspirations. In South Africa, Powell (2012) studied the role of Vocational Education and Training (VET) in poverty alleviation and demonstrated that youths' perceptions of a 'meaningful' life and the ways in which they spoke about it offered significant insights into local notions of 'well-being'. In Australia, Bok (2010) showed that low Socio Economic Status (SES) students in urban Australia had substantive aspirations but had a less developed capacity to realize them due to a lack of access to opportunities. Along the same line, Crivello (2011) observed that in Peruvian children's aspirations to be 'someone' and to escape poverty migration was an implicit means. The three studies inform our analysis through highlighting the importance of understanding the linkages between local notions of well-being and the 'meaningful' or 'good' life; between aspiration, socioeconomic status and the (in)ability to realise aspirations; and the roles of education and migration in shaping aspirations and the capacity to aspire. Thus, the approach allows for a grounded analysis of different dimensions of youth choices and preferences within the structures of inequality and deprivation that are endemic in a remittance-dependent community in Bangladesh.

To Appadurai (2004:62), aspirations are always formed in interaction and in the norms that frame people's social life, and are located relationally on the 'larger map of local ideas and beliefs about life' (ibid). Research shows that social and economic life are structured by the principles of generation (Alanen, 2003) and gender (Mayall, 2003) and, as discussed earlier, this is certainly the case in Bangladesh (Aziz and Maloney, 1985). In the context of migration studies, children and youths tend to be represented as passive; their roles within the household are barely acknowledged, let alone visible (Whitehead and Hashim 2005). Based on her ethnographic research in Burkina Faso, Thorsen (2006) shows that youths and children in different social settings have little symbolic or material power to express their feelings, preferences and decisions overtly due to the existing power inequalities within the household and society. Nonetheless, it is also true that youths act upon their belief that a better future can be accessed through migration even if they cannot negotiate overtly with their elders (ibid). The ability and power to choose and act regarding the preferred way of life for these groups, therefore, need to be examined within the particular social norms and context, which condition and contradict the opportunity to act directly and indirectly in that given space.

3.2 Remittances as a Special Form of Resource

The potential of remittances to provide new opportunities for the individual and household to diversify and encourage investment in human, physical and social capital in order to enhance the household income and production and in turn develop and expand the members' life choices is a well-researched issue (de Haan et al., 2000: 30 and UNDP, 2014: v, Ellis, 2003: 3). In analysing how remittances can be used to create opportunity for youths, this paper considers capital and/or wealth accumulation and their meanings from a socio-cultural perspective. It will borrow Ferguson's (1992) idea that exchange is culturally regulated and guided along socially, legally or morally approved

paths. To him, any attempt practically to recognize wealth holding in any particular setting needs to capture the specific cultural construction and forms of property and exchange that constitutes a 'cultural topography of wealth' (Ferguson 1992: 70). The above framework will offer a 'topography' of remittances that lays open the different opportunity spaces for male and female youths to aspire in culturally approved ways, the logic behind investments opening opportunity spaces and the different interests motivating the establishment and enforcement of cultural rules governing their use. In doing so, the 'pathways' of remittance exchange will be conceived as culturally and politically constructed.

3.3 Intra-household Bargaining and Capability Approaches

At this point, the household as a unit of analysis demands some discussion to take into account the various ways in which individuals assert their needs and preferences and the strategies they employ in terms of remittance use within this unit. Writing on the intra-household dynamics of gender relations, Kabeer (1998:92) criticised Neo-Classical Economics' treatment of the household as a 'black box' of joint welfare maximisation and unified preferences and pooled resources. Drawing on examples from non-unitary models, Kabeer emphasises the importance of looking at the household members' 'divergence of preferences' which is again regulated by the differentiated nature of power and its exercise. In effect, there are potentially different levels of wealth, consumption, leisure and work within the household. Amartya Sen (1990), although agreeing that the household is a realm of extensive conflict and pervasive cooperation, suggest a capability approach which evaluates the functioning available for individuals to choose rather than, or in addition to, the functioning they eventually achieve. To Sen, agency, freedom and choices are fundamental to understanding people's wellbeing. He also makes a distinction between the 'opportunity aspect' and the 'process aspect' of freedom. While the former is concerned with the opportunities available to a person to achieve things that s/he has reason to value, the latter is more about the agency and processes to pursue and realise goals that s/he values. (Sen 2009). For the current study, the remittance practices of the households can well be conceived as the 'opportunity aspect' whereas the different capacity of youths to aspire epitomizes the 'process aspect'.

Unlike Kabeer (1999), who articulates multiple facets of female agency in her conceptualisation of 'female empowerment', Sen (1990: 148) focuses on a person's perceptions about his/her own self-interest, which is often 'overshadowed by social rules and by conventional perceptions of legitimacy.' This is of particular relevance to our analysis of male and female youths' life choices in migrant villages of Bangladesh, which have their own rules governing social life.

In contrast to the capability approaches, the bargaining literature presupposes that power and gender relations are central to intra-household inequalities. Agarwal (1997) in particular argues that individuals within the household exercise bargaining in relation to specific resources as well as their differential importance. To her, while the co-existence of both self-interest and altruism motivates individuals to act, the embeddedness of the household within a wider institutional environment and the roles of groups/coalitions can fundamentally influence this bargaining process. Also, there are interlocking cultural, temporal and spatial dimensions of social differences, i.e. age, birth order, sibling composition, physical and mental disability, illness and relationship to the household head as

well as cyclical changes in size and composition which influence the intra-household decision making and resource management (Heissler 2008).

Both the capability and bargaining approaches are of enormous value for understanding the intra-household dynamics of remittances and the ways in which they create differential opportunity spaces for male and female youths to make their life choices. In what follows, the paper presents the processes through which remittances are converted into various forms of resources by the households.

4. The 'Topography' of Remittances in the Household

If we take poverty in its multi-dimensional terms such as the overlapping deprivation of education, health and standard of living as developed by the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) (see Alkire and Santos 2010) and material deprivation, desperation, lack of security, dignity, risk and high cost of thin comfort, as articulated by Appadurai (2004: 66), then we must conclude that all of the households interviewed in the study somehow fall into that 'poor' category. The classification of the households in the high, middle and low income group has distinct purposes in research. A study like this, which focuses on people's voices, nonetheless relies more on their own interpretation of class. People who possess enough land to meet their yearly requirement for rice are known as rich (*valo obostha*), those who can manage to produce or buy enough to eat three times a day all year round as middling poor (*konorokom chole*), and those who cannot earn enough to have at least three proper meals a day as the poorest (*Khub Garib*) in the villages. The trend of migration was higher among the middling poor than the rich and the poorest. The migrant households interviewed tended to belong to this class.

4.1 Survival First

The remittance behaviour of the household, therefore, primarily aims at removing the constraints such as the lack of basic amenities, risk of falling into poverty and creating opportunities through investing in land, houses, education and marriage, the meaning and process of which are highly contextual and socially embedded. Migration of one or more members on their own or other members' initiative help households to escape their precarious conditions as this offers 'intergenerational interdependence' and 'protective function' (Heissler 2011). Remittances provided households with a greater sense of food security by giving the members uninterrupted access to money to meet their dietary needs and food preferences and so ensure an active, healthy life. Households' situation changed dramatically due to the arrival of remittances. As a respondent stated, "Now we can afford chicken and beef curry once a month for lunch or dinner, as well as *ruti* (bread), *muri* (puffed rice), *pantabhat* (watered rice), and eggs and tea for breakfast". Meeting the poorer households' basic food requirements is only one manifestation of how remittances contribute to their survival. Migrant households also spent their remittances on buying medicine on a regular basis, covering the education of their children and improving their living standards through

buying and renovating houses and homesteads, indicating a relative improvement in all three dimensions of MPI (Alkire and Santos 2010).

4.2 Investing in Tangible Wealth

Most migrant households incurred a sizable loan (usually between US\$500-4000) to finance their migration. After loan repayment and assisting the household's consumption, the next priority for the migrant households is to build some tangible property i.e. land and houses. The trajectory however differs according to the starting position of the house as well as the asset base. While larger, low income and landless households were spending more on household consumption and basic necessities such as food and medicine, smaller, middle income and landowning households have invested in land, agriculture, business or house building. The pattern of agricultural-based investment includes purchasing agricultural land, leasing land and releasing mortgaged land to cover cultivation and agriculture production costs which include the hiring of labour, purchasing farm inputs and using equipment.

In a country which offers little social protection for poorer people, landed property serves as cultivation or other forms of income for migrant households. It also provides families with "an unwritten social certificate" to promote the family's reputation, power and status (Sikder, 2013: 232). The social hierarchy in rural Bangladesh is generally understood in terms of people's access to land (Gardner 1995: 65). Similarly, spending on building and improving houses is also a sign of prestige, prosperity and development. Apart from being a basic need and a matter of status that directly affects human lifestyle and quality of life in terms of comfort and privacy (see LaGory, Fitzpatrick and Ritchey 2001: 633), in Bangladesh a house is also an income-generating asset for securing, diversifying and improving livelihoods. Moreover, like elsewhere in the world, a house provides better living conditions and protection from natural calamities (Taylor, 1999; de Haas, 2007; Harvey, 2007; Zhao and Barry 2014). In line with Lucas and Stark (1985: 904), it can be argued that the prestige and influence that households earn through investing remittances in private and public assets form important social and economic assets for the future also.

4.3 Developing Human Resources

First-generation migrants paid more attention to facilitating consumption and building tangible property. The second generation, by contrast, expressed their willingness to spend on education. Luna, who was trying to follow in her migrant mother's footsteps, stated: "If I go abroad, I shall educate my son", whereas, for her mother, migration had been a survival strategy which allowed her household to climb the ladder of economic mobility. From Luna's statement, it appears that the household wished to achieve social mobility and also invest in the third generation's education while the second generation (Luna and her cousins) remained largely uneducated, something which is also evident in other South Asian contexts (Osella and Osella, 2000). However, the social organisation of the family in Bangladesh shapes the extent to which migrants like Luna can fulfil their aspirations. Ultimately, it is the head of the household who retains the power and responsibility to accommodate all preferences and, although spending preferences are discussed within the

household, the final decision depends on the household head's analysis of what is best for the household.

4.4 Remittance Decision Making

While remittances have enabled many households to improve their socio-economic conditions, not all the members are involved in the household decision-making. Whereas in nuclear households, the wives of migrants became de facto head of their households and had exercised their agency and freedom to choose where to spend their remittances, in joint households, the fathers retained their control over the household and remittances alike. The patriarchal system gives men the upper hand in the decision-making while women, even after being de facto head of the household, must seek the approval of their husband, brother or other male relatives. In many ways, the youth's aspirations were influenced by their relationship with the head of the household-cum-decision-maker.

It is within this context that, building upon the cases collected from the Tangail villages, the following sections will discuss youth aspirations regarding education, occupation and familial relations.

5. The 'Capacity to Aspire'

5.1 I Want to Complete my Schooling First

"I shall think about taking 'a line' (a job) after I complete my HSC (Higher Secondary Certificate). My maternal uncle said that there is no need to go abroad, I can stay here and do a good job."- said Rumi (17), when asked about his future education plans. His sister Rubina (18) said: "I don't need to think about my future. I will do what my parents consider best for me". Rumi and Rubina belonged to a migrant household in Paratoli, Tangail. During our field work both of them were studying in the eleventh grade at the local secondary school.

Their father, Jillur (48), who was once a marginal farmer, had decided to go abroad as he increasingly had difficulties to bear the cost of the five-member family. With his small earnings, the household struggled to buy food and, on occasion, could afford only two meals per day (lunch and dinner). He went to Saudi Arabia in 2000 with the help of a local agent at a cost of Tk. 365,000 (US\$ 8320) , borrowed from the extended family and neighbours. During his first two years abroad, Jillur was basically jobless and had no contact with the family. Rohima (42) underwent much hardship during this time. She had to maintain her family by borrowing money. In order to avoid pressure from their creditors, the family went into hiding for a few months. Jillur started sending remittances about two years after migrating, when he managed to find a job in a local restaurant. He had been employed there ever since. He earned Tk. 20,000 (US\$ 255) and sent it to his brother-in-law's (his wife's brother) account every month.

It took two years for Rohima to pay off the migration loan from remittances. At the time of the interview, the landless household was surviving on remittances. The remittances were mostly used to meet the household expenses, including food, education and utility bills. Three years ago, the family managed to construct a tin-shed house, funded by remittances. In the absence of Jillur, Rohima built the house with the help of her brother and in-laws.

Rumi's eldest sister, Masuma (20), got married at the age of 16. As she was getting older and had two younger siblings, her uncle and mother arranged for her to marry into a non-migrant family. The marriage, however, did not work out, and Masuma returned to her natal home. Since then, Masuma had been living with her parents. Masuma was neither pursuing education nor had a job. To her, "my parents will decide my future." The last time we visited this household, her father was at home for a holiday and he and his wife were preparing to go to Dhaka to arrange their younger daughter Rubina's marriage to her maternal cousin. When asked why they are not seeking another husband for Masuma, Jillur replied that they would try again once the younger one was married off.

As Rumi's illiterate parents could not always foresee his study-related needs, Rumi informed his mother whenever he needed extra-coaching so that Rohima could pay for it from the remittances. According to Jillur: "Now that my son is studying in a higher grade, he needs more money for tuition and other purposes. I feel a lot of pressure as I have fixed earnings abroad. I have asked my family to cut down on additional costs so that I can continue to pay for his studies."

Youth aspirations regarding education in the villages are closely linked to the cultural construction of 'an educated person'. Like Rumi, a large number of youths in the locality were willing to pursue an education at least up to higher secondary (class XII) level to make themselves eligible for non-menial work. In the local context, an HSC degree also carries the symbolic value of being 'educated' which is considered a gateway for escaping the age-old image of poor farmers. In effect, education is perceived as the best hope and most effective means for young people in rural communities to access the resources needed to secure the household's livelihood and improve its members' life chances (Simelane 1995: 218, Ansell 2000: 147-148).

The social and economic values attached to different levels of education and the facilities available to them are also seen to influence youths' capacity to aspire for higher education. Youths who had achieved good results in the public examinations expressed their willingness to study either medicine or engineering at university level which were of high economic and social value. This study adds another dimension to the link between education and youth aspirations, in that we found youths were less willing to take skill training. In the rural context, skill and technical trainings not only ascribed a lower social value than university degrees but also people believed that such training could not provide them with jobs. "I know that, in Bangladesh, there are poly-technique institutes. But people say that it is useless to get training from there since there are not enough jobs to absorb the trainees", said Mahi (16) -the son of a non-migrant family. His father was a middle-income farmer. He studied at a reputed college 15 kilometres from his village. He rented a room near the college and went home every weekend. The family spent Tk. 5,000-6,000 (US\$65-75) on his education while the total monthly expenditure of the entire family was Tk. 10-15,000 (US\$130-190).

Yet, for many youths from low-income families in the villages, acquiring life choices through higher education is time-consuming, expensive and often beyond their means. Also, the universities are mostly located in the capital or larger cities. While public universities are highly competitive, the private universities with lower entry requirements are expensive. Youths were thus mostly found to study at local colleges that provide Bachelor of Arts (BA) degrees. Some youths dropped out of school to take paid work which was crucial for supporting their family. Like elsewhere, students and families from low SES backgrounds in Bangladesh were relatively less familiar with higher education as a field. Not only were the HE institutions often located at a geographical distance, but the knowledge and information required to gain entry might also be relatively inaccessible to these students and their families (Bok 2010: 164). All of this indicates that there are structural constraints in the locality which limits the youth' capacity to aspire for higher education.

In general, migrant and non-migrant households spent 10-25% of their earnings on educating their children. The expenses involved study materials, such as books and stationery, uniforms, snacks, school fees, transport and private tuition. However, the amount spent varies from student to student depending on their grades. The cost of private tuition varied from BDT 200-500 (US\$3-6) depending on where and how the students were taught - at home, at the teacher's house or at school in a group. As Ashek (16) from Nagpur village informed us: "I need to have good preparation in maths, physics, and chemistry. We live in a village where we lack good teachers. So I get help from my seniors". Like Ashek, the youths in the study villages were able to identify how they could avail a 'better' education, but with a different capacity to obtain one. According to Soma (17), younger daughter of Mala (38)- a migrant to Jordan from Chobipur, " I used to attend a private coaching class before my HSC. My mother used to bear all my educational expenses." As male and female youth respondents informed, without remittances, it would have been difficult for them to pursue an education. Remittances not only helped these households to avoid sliding down into further poverty but also enabled them to accumulate resources. Remittances in the study households were also used to finance short-and long-term skill-development courses. It is here that the remittance-opportunity nexus works to enhance the youths' educational aspirations. The case study implies that the desire for education increases when one or more household members migrate. Youths from migrant households with a constant source of remittances enjoyed more opportunities to choose their aspired life which, of course, varied across the socio-economic conditions and genders.

It is clear from Rumi and his sisters' statements that the capacity to aspire for education are highly circumscribed by gender norms of marriage, education and household responsibility for boys and girls. Female youths pursued education as much as their brothers and almost all the women expressed a willingness to become a doctor, police officer, NGO worker or teacher. However, they also knew the reality of rural Bangladeshi women being expected to get married in their teens. Although the need for women's education is proclaimed by almost everyone, there existed a general apathy about women's employment outside the home, as women had to bear complete responsibility for the household and children. Female youths, in general, are driven by the social norm that women belong in the home (Del Franco 2010, Heissler 2008, Rashid 2012). The majority of parents value their daughter's education as a marker of status and in function of marriage (Del Franco 2010).

We have been told that too much education might also make it difficult to find a suitable husband for a girl. Most of the female youths were sceptical and confused about the possibility of building an independent career. This is also why the female youths wanted a 'good marriage' and stated that the 'family decision is my decision' when discussing their marriage choices. According to the teachers, although girls had a good record of educational attainment and accomplishment, their dropout rate was much higher in class IX and above due to marriage. We shall return to this discussion in Section 5.5.

5.2. All I Want is a Government Chakri

"My future plan is not so big. I just want a Chakri (salaried job)": said Zia, son of Ali (47), who had been a migrant worker in Saudi Arabia for the past 15 years. Zia spent his early life in his maternal uncle's home. As his father was away, his maternal uncles took responsibility for him so that he could avoid falling in with 'bad companions.' He obtained his bachelor's degree from a local college and then worked in a renowned brand shop in Dhaka for a year, before leaving his job in the hope of finding a better one. Motivated by his maternal uncles and peers, he also tried to migrate to Singapore and contacted middlemen, but all of his efforts proved in vain. Meanwhile, he spent Tk. 45,000 on a laptop, and attended basic computer training (MS word, Excel, etc.) in Shakhipur, a nearby town. He thought that this training would help him in his job.

Zia's mother Rokeya thought that she is now living a better life because of her husband's migration. 'Now we have standing in society', she said. At the time of our interview, she was also trying to get her son a government job. She didn't want to send her son abroad. She justified it as follows: "If I come today from abroad, tomorrow I'll be poor since I'll have no work and no money." She added: "If my son gets a job in Bangladesh, he will be able to live in city and lead a better life. But if he becomes a migrant worker like his father, his wife will have to manage the household and money, like me... I will choose an educated wife for my son. An educated mother can teach her child properly."

While Zia did not state directly whether he liked or disliked her mother's plan, it was clear that he had a hierarchical relationship with her mother. On talking to both, we got the idea that his mother and maternal uncles were trying to guide him in his future course of action, which he did not like. Also, Zia did not possess a positive image of his migrant father. Although he recognised the importance of his father being abroad, he was not proud of what his father did abroad (he works in a local mosque). In his imagination, Singapore was a much better place to live, with modern civic facilities and better earning opportunities. "If I go abroad, I shall go to Singapore or Dubai. I don't want to go to an Arab country, which employ lots of menial workers." He stated that his aged, ailing father should return home for good, but also added, "He can only come back when I am self-dependent."

Like Zia, in general, youths belonging to migrant and non-migrant households expressed their willingness to take a Chakri or become an 'Officer' - which in local parlance meant doing service in a public or private organization on a monthly salary. The public discourse made them believe that

there were job-security (permanent), regular payment after retirement from the fund generated during services ('pension'), residential facilities (house) and 'opportunities to earn extra' in government jobs, although the salary was unattractive (beton kom). Such an aspiration is rooted in the greater socio-economic condition where people strive to earn a livelihood that may offer social security against the risk of poverty (Rashid 2008, Sikder 2013). Secondly, the cultural value of a government job is very high compared to other professions due to the power, status and job security of such a service holder (BRAC 2006b). More importantly, as a region, Tangail has a historical precedence of producing highly educated persons with high profile jobs in the civil service, judiciary, police and defence. The long tradition of people joining the services has enabled families from all socio-economic backgrounds to find their children an 'official' Chakri, which is not excessively high up but that offers safety, security and honour. While the poor socio-economic condition and cultural practices in Tangail have broadened youth's opportunity to seek livelihoods beyond agriculture, the choices were also circumscribed by their inaccessibility to cash, higher education and dependence on rich and elite people of the village.

The capacity of youths to desire for a Chakri was not gender neutral in Tangail villages. A Chakri is a phenomenon which is intended to be reserved for men for a number of reasons. Service means engaging with the public domain which, in the context of Bangladesh, tends to be dominated by men. By engaging in Chakri, a woman is considered to neglect her household responsibilities and children. More importantly, females' engagement in a salaried job often emasculates their men- the principal provider for the family. Given the above, only women with no male provider can join the services. In fact, households were used to fund the education of both sons and daughters with two different aims - sons were expected to become a service holder, professional, migrant or businessman, while daughters were educated to be eligible for a better marriage and become an 'educated' mother. Only in exceptional cases, were remittances invested in female education with the aim of obtaining a Chakri.

Youths had also developed a natural apathy towards agricultural work due to practical reasons. Tangail is a low-lying area which is submerged by water for almost half the year. Although livestock and agriculture were common means of livelihood, neither the youths nor their parents saw any future in farming. Historically, people in this region have also seen the growth of the weaving industry rather than the formation of small agro-based farms which are seen elsewhere in Bangladesh. While almost all of the youths- both males and females - reserved time for the farming activities of the household, none of them aspired to become 'farmers' in the future. "I feel too hot to work in the sun", 'it hampers my studies' - comments like these expressed the interviewees' disdain for agricultural work. In reality, the networks and culture of migration that developed in the region expanded the youths' opportunity not to aspire to become farmers which is of a lower social and economic value.

The study observed a general lack of desire among youths to start a business due to a lack of capital, insurance and back-up plans. Although loans are readily available for migration, it is not so for business, stated Kuddus (40), a returnee from Saudi Arabia. Interestingly enough, almost all the returnees tried to invest in a business upon their return home, implying that business was never very aspired but rather considered as a stop-gap strategy. We came across migrants who were rolling their foreign-earned money as capital into productive cycles of poultry, fishing or paddy businesses

while waiting to migrate again. In most cases, the migrants felt that it was too risky to invest due to a lack of insurance against loss. In many cases, the capital was consumed by meeting other needs, such as medical treatment or sudden shocks.

"Earlier, when I used to move between the country and abroad, I used to run a paddy business with my brother-in-law. We used to buy paddy from the producers and sell it at the local wholesale market. I used to make a profit of Tk10-12,000 (US\$ 130-155) per month. After a year, I fell seriously ill. Since I had no savings, I used the business capital for my treatment and household consumption." (Saiful (37) a returnee from Dubai)

The youths' plans about their future trajectories in business were influenced by stories of failed business ventures in the household or community. However, the actual course of action depended on the need and socio-economic condition of the households. We came across non-migrants and returnees who, faced with no other option, became vendors or petty traders to ensure the minimum livelihood for the household. Remittances' temporal impact in providing limited opportunities is also evident in Saiful's statement.

Whatever the occupational aspirations are, Zia's case reveals that the youth's capacity to choose a life is affected by the generational norms about household decision making. This is why, although the needs and preferences of the members varied, they usually accepted the decision of the head of the household. On a number of occasions, the household heads (both male and female) claimed their authority: "Who will take the decision if not me?" In effect, other household members either accepted their authority or negotiated their demands. Zia, for example, persuaded his parents not to send him to the Gulf, which in his eyes was 'a country for low paid workers.' However, he had to compromise regarding his guardian's decision to find him a government post due to his unwillingness to continue working as a salesman in a Dhaka shop. In fact, it is the intergenerational contract (Whitehead et al 2007:18), which simultaneously creates relations of dependence, interdependence and autonomy through the convergence and divergence of aspirations. This is because, in the context of rural Bangladesh, youths are neither autonomous nor individualised and pay the utmost attention to their family commitments; they are also economically oriented (Rao 2015). Youth aspirations in that context are highly influenced by their own personal complex relations with their parents, entrenched in generational norms (Del Franco 2010).

It is also evident that remittances contribute to occupational aspirations in a number of ways. First, households with a remittance supply were more able to educate their children in preparation for an occupation. Secondly, the ability to afford 'speed money' (bribes) for Chakri is higher for migrant households. Zia, for instance, acquired skill certificates in computer training to prepare himself for a job in the country. His family also paid speed money for a permanent government job. Remittances thus often create a manoeuvring ability among youths in remittance-receiving households regarding occupational choices. Talking about her daughter who was studying at HSC level, Niru, the wife of a non-migrant, said:

"She (our daughter) got A+ in S.S.C. She was never placed third in school. People get a job after completing H.S.C nowadays, but no job is available without Tk.4/5 lacs (US\$5000-6000) (bribes). We don't have the financial ability to pay that amount." (Niru (34))

In contrast to Niru, who had no cash flow to pay the bribe for her daughter's job, Rokeya exhibited the ability to spend that money on behalf of her son, Zia.

Thirdly, the onus of earning and contributing to the family is very high for male youths in non-migrant families especially if the household lacks able earning members (Heissler 2011), whereas it is less so for remittance-receiving households. The migration of a father or brother allows non-migrant youths to choose their preferred occupation. 20-year-old Zarif, the son of Zohora (a non-migrant), was forced to take a temporary job due to his father's physical inability to earn, whereas youths in migrant households were seen to wait for years to find a suitable job (Zia, for example). Crucially, it may appear that remittances create unequal opportunities, yet the opportunity spaces for occupational choice that remittances offer to all should not be overlooked.

5.3. Bidesh (Foreign Land) Is My Last Resort

"I shall try to do something in the country first. If that fails, then I shall ask my brother to arrange for me to migrate," said, Sohag (19), a local college student. Sobuj (24), Sojib (22), Sohag (19) and Salim (16) were four brothers who belonged to a middle earning household in Nagpur village, Tangail. Their father, Hazi, was a farmer and also had a livestock business. In 2011, Hazi sent his second son, Sojib, to Saudi Arabia to diversify the earnings of the six-member household at a cost of Tk. 400,000 (US\$5120). He had to sell the only piece of land the family owned and borrowed from others to manage the migration costs. Although Hazi earns Tk. 400 (US\$ 5) from his livestock business, after Sojib's migration, remittances appeared to be the principal source of earning for the family. He used to remit Tk. 50-60,000 (US\$ 640-770) every four to six months into Hazi's bank account.

We had the opportunity to talk to Sobuj and Sohag. Sobuj had a Master's degree in Economics from a college near Dhaka. He served first as a NGO worker and later as a merchandiser in a business firm after graduating. However, he lost his last job during his Master's examination. Since 2014, he had been trying to get a job, dropping CVs into every possible place, but produced no results. When we met him, he was busy constructing a brick house, which was mainly financed by his migrant brother. The frustration of not getting a proper job was written all over his face. He also requested us to look for a decent job for him. When asked about his evaluation of the role of remittances in the family, he said: "Now, we are highly dependent on remittances. My father has a cattle rearing business, but that is not enough. I am unemployed and the two younger brothers are studying. So, remittances are extremely important to us... I have asked my brother to help me start a shop in the village and he said he will do it."

Like Sohag, youths in the study villages expressed contradictory views about their aspiration for Bidesh (migration to foreign land). During the FGDs, some youths expressed their willingness to go abroad after finishing college, whereas most youths planned to go abroad only after all other avenues to become established in life had been exhausted. It was clear that the overall standard of living in the country, lack of wealth and education generated more aspirations whereas youths were well aware of the hardships associated with such migration. Yet, the youths also stated that migration was not an end in itself, but a means to earn capital with which to fulfil the ultimate goal of living a 'better life.'

More importantly, remittances may have differing impacts on brothers depending on how they see remittances creating future pathways for them. While highly-educated Sobuj was looking for a decent job or business, Sohag found it appropriate to follow his migrant brother's path whereas Salim had no occupational ambition as such. In answer to our question about parents' expectations and the relative importance of the remitter in the family, Sobuj said:

"There was a time when I used to contribute hugely to our household economy. Now, I don't have a job at all. My parents and neighbours think that I shouldn't spend time on agriculture or husbandry. They think that a Master's degree holder should only do office work. So, in that sense, I feel pressure on me... I can feel that my brother has become more important to my parents than I am. Now I'm a burden on this family."

Sobuj stated that he has no intention of going abroad as a migrant worker like his brother Sojib. To him, "Sojib left school while he was in class VIII. He used to do nothing here. So he was sent abroad. If my third brother fails to do anything here, he will also be sent abroad."

Sobuj's statement implies education and labour migration are not always positively linked. Education up to Secondary School Certificate (SSC) level may be useful for getting a job abroad, but higher education may limit the possibilities of labour migration at the individual level. Bangladesh has yet to capture the labour market for skilled workers. As a result, people with a Bachelor of Social Science (BSS) or Master of Social Science (MSS) degree often find themselves overqualified and underemployed regarding unskilled and semiskilled work. There were households where migrants supported the education of one or more sibling to enhance the social status of the household, increasing the choices of its members. Sobuj was one of these, who felt great pressure from the family to secure a white collar job to enhance the prestige of the family, whereas the household consumption was already secured by his younger brother's labour migration. In this case, educational attainment and parental expectations influences youths' capacity to aspire, more than sibling age and birth order.

As is clear from Sobuj and Zia's narratives, foreign lands are hierarchically located. While some countries, such as Singapore and Dubai, were associated with economic opportunity and accomplishment, countries like Saudi Arabia or Malaysia conveyed an image of hardship, hard working conditions, and so on. The youths also mentioned that they often felt discouraged by the high migration costs, misappropriation of money by intermediaries and high risk involved. These ideas were mostly shaped by the stories of successful or failed migration, as well as the profiles of the returnees. Sometimes, the hardship and experience of their parents dissuaded them from pursuing it as a short- or long-term livelihood strategy. These findings signify the ways in which information flow impacts on the youths' capacity to aspire in the migrant community.

For youths in migrant households, remittances offer more opportunities to look for jobs or to access training and education to qualify them to get a better job abroad. The aspiration for student migration was much higher among youths than migration for unskilled labour, as the former carried a higher social value and better earning opportunities. During the FGDs, some of the respondents stated that they had completed an 'English Course' and contacted some 'Agencies' to find out about

their prospects of pursuing a higher education abroad. Some said: "Money won't be a problem. But, we don't get accurate information about higher education staying in the villages." In spite of their actual initiatives to fulfil the desire, a lack of proper information often inhibits youths' capacity to proceed further (Bok 2010).

While the possibility of economic mobility through migration was readily admitted by the youths, they were sceptical about the social status of the migrant families due to their involvement in menial work abroad and low level of education. In the village context, a high income is a necessary condition for economic solvency and high buying power. However, a high income without education and a good job has social value. A middle income family with educated and service holder members have a higher social status than a high income household with uneducated and menial workers abroad. This is why male youths aspired more for student migration which offered opportunities for both social and economic mobility. The relative social importance of 'official jobs' was captured like this: "Migrants may have money but an office job holder accrues a lot of social respect." This statement implies the importance of 'prestige' (shomman) as a crucial element of class that youths care about in the formation and fulfilment of their aspirations.

5.4. Why Shall I Go Abroad- It's Men's Domain

Female youths had a different perspective of labour migration. Unlike their male counterparts, female youths in this study rarely aspired to labour migration. As this study found, women in Bangladesh took decisions to migrate only in special circumstances of high risk of poverty and lack of male members to provide the household. Lopa's (20) migrant mother showed this clearly: Lopa's widowed mother, Mala (38), migrated to Jordan, leaving Lopa and her two siblings behind at their maternal grandparents' home. While Mala was one of the principal income sources for her parents and siblings, she sent her remittances to her brother in return for care and security -the two most important resources that Bangladeshi women need from their natal home in cases of widowhood or separation. Mala commented: "My brother maintains all the accounts. He is educated. He understands it better than me". In reality, the family wanted to send Mala's brother abroad but he did not qualify because of a broken leg. He later continued his education and found an accountant's job in a local NGO. He along with his wife and children were living with his parents, siblings, nephew and niece. The family expressed their univocal trust in Mala's brother's capacity to handle the remittances. This is not unusual in a society like Bangladesh, where sons are more valued than daughters for economic and social reasons.

In the ethos of village life, female migration is reserved for desperate and lone women e.g. divorced, deserted or widowed females. It is these structural constraints, created by gender ideologies of honour, safety and vulnerability that inhibit female youths' capacity to aspire for labour migration abroad. Over the years, the increased incidence of torture and vulnerability to sexual exploitation has also raised public objection to female migration. Like Mala most female migrants, who negotiated their migration in the first place, conceded to the socially approved gender norm of submitting their earnings to the male head of their family in order to strike a balance between their personal and household interests. While women's migration increases their autonomy and

confidence, the type of work they do carries a low social status and, therefore, families try to restrict their migration to retain the household's status (Rao 2009, Rashid 2012). As Fatema (30), wife of returnee Kuddus, commented: "Those who married but their husband didn't keep them, or those with a bad reputation can go abroad."

This is why, despite their migrant mother's huge contribution to the household's economic mobility, most female youths did not wish to migrate abroad, although this remained a viable life choice for male and female youths alike. While the mother's migration opened up the potential for their daughters' migration through their social networks, most daughters described how they had rejected going abroad:

"My Mum asked me to go abroad, but I didn't want to. I'm afraid I won't be able to live alone. Also I have a son whom I need to care for. Who is going to take care of him in my absence?" (Luna (23))

"I admire my Mum. She has done a lot for the family but I don't want to follow her path. You know, people don't speak positively about women migrants." (Aleya (27))

"I wish I could go abroad like my Mum. I asked my husband (a migrant). He said, "Take the divorce letter from me, before you migrate." (Shorifa (27))

5.5 The Capacity to Hope for 'a Good Marriage'

In most cases, daughters of the migrants were married off within the migration period of their parents. Households spent a relative larger amount of their remittances on the marriage of the young female members. While the parents of a girl faced tremendous social pressure after she reaches puberty, remittances helped to cover the cost of her marriage. Most migrant parents wanted to marry off their daughter within the migration period to take the advantage of the cash flow. Like elsewhere in Bangladesh (see Heissler 2008, Del Franco 2010) girls in the study villages were expected to be married off between 15-19. Some girls expressed their unwillingness to marry as they wanted to study further. However, they also said that they had to agree at the end because parents felt pressure as girls grow older (when she reaches the age of 20), as boys may not choose them or may demand a higher dowry because of this. In other words, female youths' opportunity spaces to fulfil their dreams about developing an independent career through education are shrunk by the social norms about their age and marriageability.

In other cases, the girls agreed with their parents simply due to the social norms and practices of abiding by one's elders' decisions. From this point of view, remittances increased the opportunity space for a good marriage of a girl. However, girls often had little choice over parental preferences of early marriage to keep down the cost of dowry. In the context of rural Bangladesh, a good marriage is considered a sound investment for the future of daughters (Rashid 2009, Rao 2015). It is not surprising, therefore, that young girls will opt for a 'good marriage' when one or more household members are working abroad and so able to finance the marriage. However, as girls informed, the

importance of marriage in establishing the right kind of female identity shrank their opportunity spaces for pursuing other aspirations such as education and career.

In effect, the study reveals that remittances interface with female youths' marriage aspirations at several levels: firstly, parents' consistent earnings abroad created hope for better marriages due to the availability of social and economic capital generated by remittances. There were some costs involved with the marriage of daughters, including a dowry, gold ornaments, utensils, gifts for the groom and a small feast. The cost of a marriage varied from Tk. 10,000 to 100,000 (US\$130-1300), depending on the socio-economic condition of the household. In many cases (as happened to Zia's sister), the migration of the groom was demanded as a dowry, implying that the girl's family should finance the groom's journey.

Secondly, female migration and poverty both carried lower social status for a bride. A few migrant mothers, like Mala (38), tried to overcome those barriers by investing their remittances in their daughters' education as well as building physical assets. This provided them with better bargaining power to choose a literate groom for their daughter. Educated female youths usually opted for an educated groom with a permanent job, but their capacity was often circumscribed by the low socio-economic condition of their households. Compared to Mala, Niru (34), the wife of a petty job holder, faced the double problem of choosing a suitable groom and meeting her daughter's demands.

"She (her daughter) demands a literate job holder. But I can't find one. She has to understand our financial ability. Would a graduate groom choose his bride from a poor family like us? He will try to maintain his standards. Won't he? There was a proposal from a groom who had an engineering diploma; he liked my daughter but not our environment. Men who work in the Army demand a lot but we can't meet it." (Niru)

Thirdly, the experiences of their parents' migration created negative aspirations among daughters regarding marrying migrants. The long separation of their parents due to migration dissuaded female youths from choosing a migrant as their life partner despite the fact that he would earn more than a farmer, worker or job holder. On the other hand, there were public discourses about migrants being involved in anti-social activities abroad including multiple relationships. As Jillur (48) - a migrant to Saudi Arabia states: "I'll never marry off my daughters to migrants. I know what migrants are".

Fourthly, migrant families were economically better able to shoulder the responsibility for their divorced daughters and marry them off again (see Masuma's case in the discussion of educational aspirations). Remittances gave the families of the girls a greater capacity to look after them after divorce and thereby allowed the girls to leave an unhappy marriage which they might have otherwise been trapped into without the remittances flowing to their parents. Unlike a non-migrant household, where divorce might be a catastrophe, placing an extra burden on the natal family, access to cash by the migrant families gave them better bargaining power to choose or attract a groom for the divorced daughter.

6. Conclusion

Causal links exist between migrants' remittances and youth aspirations. Drawing on Appadurai's conceptualisation of aspiration as 'the cultural and navigational capacity of the poor,' and based on the qualitative data collected from migrant-intensive villages in Bangladesh, the paper delineated the crucial ways in which remittances contribute to the shaping of youths' aspirations in migrant households. The central argument was that the youths' capacity to look forward to their preferred way of life increases manifold as and when their family members migrate abroad and send remittances that have a considerable impact on the accumulation of social, cultural and economic resources.

Three areas of youth aspirations were explored in this paper: education, occupation, and migration. In the context where education is seen as a ladder to earning social mobility, the youths, irrespective of their age, expressed a desire to obtain a basic education - which means completing higher secondary school. Higher education, in contrast, was less aspired to, not only because it is often unavailable or expensive and beyond their means but also because the youths are under pressure 'to be established' before the remittances cease to flow. The study identified that the youths' capacity to aspire for education is influenced by a number of factors i.e. the cultural construction of 'education', the social and economic values attached to different levels of education, and the facilities and information available to them.

The youths in this study recognised, at least to some degree, their capacity to choose from a variety of potential career pathways. While the youths of all SES expressed their willingness to become 'established' in life, most of them expressed a deep inclination towards government jobs due to their high social value, and less so for agriculture or business. To many, labour migration abroad serves only as a stop gap strategy or the last choice in life. In all cases, youths in the migrant households had a better capacity to realise their occupational desires as they had access to cash through remittances. While male and female youths possess similar ambitions regarding their future education, the choice of female youths to pursue a job or career are, in most cases, circumscribed by gender norms in rural Bangladesh which sees women as the carer and men as the provider of the household. More importantly, female youths' capacity to aspire to migration was constrained by the gender discourses about age, marriageability, honour, vulnerability and insecurity. In this context, female youths mostly see their future in a 'good marriage,' the prospect of which again rises when families have access to remittances. The paper thus brought out complexities in youth aspirations using the lenses of gender, generation, class, remittances and so on.

As a special form of resources - remittances are transformed into culturally-valued economic and social wealth in multiple ways. The use of remittances to buy the basic food items, land and houses or to cover the cost of the education and marriage of their children are, in effect, the means or pathways through which household members increase the possibility of attaining social standing, generational mobility and social capital, which are ends in themselves but also instrumental in generating aspirations among youths about their future pathways. While Appadurai (2004) has applied his notion of the 'capacity to aspire' mostly in the context of economic inequality, this paper extended his perspective by showing that gender and generational inequality may crucially impact

on youths' capacity to aspire and that all youths are not equally benefitted by the opportunity spaces created by remittances.

The contribution of these findings to the remittance-development nexus lies in its fresh insights, which suggests that youths can well be conceived as potential partners in the sustainable use of remittances. The particular notions which they carry about their future may appear irrational from economic or development points of view, since these are highly entrenched in their social circumstances. Yet, it is only through developing an explicit understanding of these aspirations, scenarios and norms that policies can find a link between specific wants or goals.

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Annex

List of Interviewees RPC Intra-Household Dynamics RMMRU, Bangladesh

Migrant Households					
Household Reference Number	Name(s)** of Adult Interview(s)	Name of Migrant	Name of Youths	Village	SES
01	Mohiuddin (F*)	Karim	Subarna (D)	Nagpur	Low
02	Rokeya (W)	Ali	Shamoli (D) Zia (S)	Nagpur	Middle
03	Hazi (F)	Sojib	Sobuj (B), Shohag (B), Salim (B)	Nagpur	High
04	Rohima (W) Jillur	Jillur	Masuma (D) Rumi (S)	Paratoli	Middle
05	Mala Hossain(M) Asma (F)	Mala	Lopa (D) Soma (D)	Chobipur	High
06	Jahanara (Sis)	Rupa	Luna (D)	Chobipur	High
07	Zahir (H)	Sahina	Shorifa (D)	Chobipur	Middle
08	Farid (H)	Sumi	Sajeda (D)	Chobipur	Low
Non-Migrant Households					
09	Bulbuli (M)	Momota (D)		Nagpur	Low
10	Siraj (F) Kanchon (M)	Mahi (S)		Nagpur	Middle
11	Zohora(M)	Sharif(S)		Porihati	Low
12	Monowara(M)	Shopna(D)		Nagpur	Low
13	Sufia(M)	Reefat(S)		Parihati	Low
14	Delu (F) Halima(M)	Sohel(S)		Nagpur	High
15	Habib (F) Kochi(M)	Tuhin(S)		Nagpur	Middle

16	Niru(M)	Khushi(D)		Parihati	Low
Returnee Households					
Household Reference Number	Name of Adults	Name of Migrant	Name of Youths	Village	Socio Economic Status
17	Mamun	Mamun	Jebon (S)	Nagpur	High
18	Kuddus Fatema (W)	Kuddus	Titu (S) Mithu(S)	Nagpur	Low
19	Akbar Priti (W)	Akbar	Akash(S)	Parihati	Middle
20	Saiful Anuma(W)	Saiful	Ashek(S)	Nagbari Nagpur	Low
21	Romena Khalil (H)	Romena	Aleya (D) Rahman (Daughter's Husband)	Paratoli	Middle
22	Feroza	Feroza	Sobur(S) Silpi (D)	Borohat	Low
23	Nazma	Nazma	Nurul(S)	Sathipur	Low
24	Salma	Salma	Shefali(D)	Sathipur	Middle

(*F=Father, M=Mother, Sis=Sister, B=Brother, W=Wife, H=Husband, S=Son, D=Daughter of the migrant member of the household)

** Pseudonyms are used to maintain respondents' confidentiality.

About the Migrating out of Poverty Research Programme Consortium

Migrating out of Poverty is a research programme consortium (RPC) funded by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID). It focuses on the relationship between migration and poverty – especially migration within countries and regions - and is located in five regions across Asia and Africa. The main goal of **Migrating out of Poverty** is to provide robust evidence on the drivers and impacts of migration in order to contribute to improving policies affecting the lives and well-being of impoverished migrants, their communities and countries, through a programme of innovative research, capacity building and policy engagement. The RPC will also conduct analysis in order to understand the migration policy process in developing regions and will supplement the world renowned migration databases at the University of Sussex with data on internal migration.

The **Migrating out of Poverty** consortium is coordinated by the University of Sussex, and led by CEO Professor L. Alan Winters with Dr Priya Deshingkar as the Research Director. Core partners are: the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU) in Bangladesh; the Centre for Migration Studies (CMS) at the University of Ghana; the Asia Research Institute (ARI) at the National University of Singapore; the African Centre for Migration & Society (ACMS) at the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa; and the African Migration and Development Policy Centre (AMADPOC) in Kenya.

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