

**SOUTH ASIA NETWORK FOR  
COMMUNICATION, DISPLACEMENT AND  
MIGRATION (SAN-CDM)**



INAUGURAL CONFERENCE

**DISPLACEMENTS AND VULNERABILITIES:  
A CONFERENCE ON FORCED MIGRATION AND MEDIA IN  
SOUTH ASIA**

**4-7 FEBRUARY, 2023  
LALITPUR, NEPAL**

**A REPORT**



(LOCAL  
PARTNER)

# **Displacements and Vulnerabilities: A Conference on Forced Migration and Media in South Asia**

4-7 February, 2023 Lalitpur, Nepal

## **A REPORT**

On the inaugural Conference of the South Asia Network for Communication, Displacement and Migration (SAN-CDM), organised by the Calcutta Research Group in collaboration with D W Akademie with support of the Nepal Institute for Peace (NIP).

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## **Acknowledgement**

The huge range of activities in the field of refugee and migration studies, undertaken by the Calcutta Research Group would not have been possible without the help of its partner agencies. We are grateful to DW Akademie for their support to the formation of the Interdisciplinary South Asia Network of Experts on Information and Communication in Refugee and Migrant Settings, between August 2022 – December 2022. The network, that is The South Asia Network for Communication, Displacement and Migration (SAN-CDM) is now hosted at CRG, which is grateful also to its members, administrators, and distinguished scholars who were ready to participate in various activities throughout the year, for making the launch of the network successful.

CRG is thankful to the eminent scholars/media practitioners/social activist/journalists who participated in different panel discussions, webinars and lectures and workshops as speakers, moderators and evaluators. CRG is also grateful to its research and administrative staff for their relentless effort to make the programmes successful.

# Introduction

CRG is working towards securing the rights for the refugees and migrants for last twenty-five years. The institution has contributed a lot in the field of migration and forced migration, gender, displacement, labour, and climate related issues. It disseminated its knowledge through several lectures, webinars, panel discussions, workshops, and conferences. Apart from the workshops and conferences, CRG's online and offline programmes have attracted audience around the world, from among academicians and civils rights advocates. including representatives of NGOs, civil rights organisations, solidarity movement agencies, as well as faculty members, students, and researchers from educational institutions from all over South Asia and beyond. CRG gets together a dynamic range of scholars and activists, journalists and educationists, poets, theatre persons, and urban planners in their various programmes. As part of CRG's continuing programme on migration and media, the interdisciplinary network SAN-CDM was launched on 27 October 2022, in collaboration with DW Akademie with an online discussion on "Climate Disaster, Migration, and New reporting: A South Asian Discussion." In this inaugural discussion five experts from South Asia spoke on the situation of climate change and its reportage in their respective locations. The discussion was moderated by eminent journalist and CRG member, Bharat Bhushan. This dialogue was also built on CRG's recently concluded media workshop "Climate Migration, Disaster, Displacement and the Role of the Media" and set the agenda for the forthcoming activities of SAN-CDM.

SAN-CDM hosted its second online event, "The Unseen Game: Infrastructure, Labour and the City" on December 15, 2022, with five speakers from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and India. In this roundtable discussion, the focus was on highlighting the precarious existence of migrant workers, their contribution to the making of infrastructure and logistics in the modern metropolis, the condition of South Asian migrant workers in the Gulf countries, as well as the role and responsibilities of the media. Apart from these, SAN-

CDM also organised an online workshop as part of its third online event, where Zobaer Ahmed of DW Akademie did a workshop with a small group of nominated participants who are working on refugees and forced migration across South Asia. In this need assessment session, the aim was to understand where the knowledge gaps are. In the light of the above context the thematic of the inaugural conference was formed, so that it acquires a more specific character by way of concretely addressing some of the frontier issues in climate induced displacements and forced migration studies. The event was organised with the support of D W Akademie, and the local support of NIP.

The thematic for the inaugural conference of 2023 also emerged from the constructive interventions made by CRG during the past few years in the field of research and public activism related to issues of migration, forced migration, climate change, labour rights, justice, dignity, and peace. It derived sustenance from CRG's dedication, in recent years, to the study of migration and refugee flows. The concluding session of the stakeholders of the network issued an appeal for justice and a coherent protection policy for the displaced persons and migrants due to climate disaster and for building an enabling solidarity network for all of those who need it.

# Concept Note

“The South Asia Consultations: Media, Information and Participation in Displacement Settings,” held between December 2021- March 2022, pointed at the interconnected and common challenges in media reporting on migration issues in the region, challenges exacerbated by the changing nature of newsrooms, complex political issues seeking to benefit from the representation of the migrant and refugees negatively, and heightened risk of climate change induced displacement across the region. The interdisciplinary SAN-CDM has been constituted to build on the findings of the ‘Consultations’ process and further explore measures to mitigate these challenges, to enhance the participation of refugees and migrants in public discourse, to enable communication and knowledge sharing between stakeholders across the region, and to create a more responsive regional media culture. In its first conference, we sought to further the aims of the network by discussing relevant and emerging areas of concern in the region, learn from each other about best practices, and bolster information and story-sharing.

## **Themes & Sessions:**

### **Hierarchies of Vulnerabilities**

The regional consultation pointed at the difficulties and structural challenges that lead to less reporting on migrant and refugee issues. It also stressed that even within larger news reporting concerned with migration, certain sections get less or no attention—sections which we are choosing to call (hierarchies of) vulnerabilities. This also signals that the hierarchies are changing and shifting, for example, vulnerabilities of (young) men and women occur on different levels. Young men might end up being more vulnerable than young women. Such nuances and categories reporting might often lose. The hierarchies may be structural, biological/ physical, locational, economic—each deepening with crisis and displacement. Which vulnerabilities in migration and displacement settings remain unaddressed in the media? How may we best represent them?

## **Reporting in the Wake of Climate Disaster**

The devastating floods in Pakistan (2022), the massive death toll, and resulting displacement (both Pakistani citizens and Afghan refugees) highlight the global nature of climate catastrophe, in which poorer, tropical nations such as those in South Asia are forced to bear the brunt of extreme weather events, water level rise, increasing cyclones, glacial lake bursts, floods, droughts, etc. and shoulder the massive environmental, financial, and human burden of the global carbon footprint. Climate catastrophe does not stop at national boundaries—the nations of South Asia together stand to lose the most in such crises. However, media reporting in and of the region has substantially concentrated on spectacular and catastrophic events, not addressing connecting and recurring issues. Climate migration is a present threat for South Asia, with one study estimating 50 million climate refugees in Bangladesh itself by 2050. Which are the stories of climate migration that need to be told?

## **How to Tell an Arresting Tale: Training Session**

The training session was to help interested participants develop human interest stories, stories of resilience and hope, promote solution-oriented journalism, and find means of empowering refugees and migrants to bring their own stories to the mainstream. Participants are encouraged to bring their case studies / stories to the workshop and develop them for a global audience.

## **At the Cross-section of Vulnerabilities: Nepal in Focus**

More than 70 migrant workers from Nepal have perished during the months leading up to the Qatar world cup, and 7500 migrant workers since 2008. Nepal continues to be one of the largest labour-migrant producing countries in the region—relying heavily on remittances. The delicate and diverse ecology of Nepal, various developmental and agricultural projects, the 2015 earthquake etc. together make the contemporary migration situation in Nepal complex and multifaceted. Making use of our location in Nepal, the network was to try to



enrich its understanding of the complex migration issues relevant to Nepal, through discussions with media persons, civil society actors, journalists, and community members.

# Programme Schedule



## 4 February: Day 1

5.00-7.00 p.m.: **Inaugural Session**

Introduction to the SAN-CDM: Samata Biswas, CRG

Welcome Address from CRG: Nasreen Chowdhory, CRG

Welcome Address: Dr. Thomas Prinz, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to Nepal

Welcome Address from DW Akademie: Andrea Marshall, DW Akademie

Welcome Address from NIP: Som Niroula, NIP

**SELF INTRODUCTIONS**

Keynote Address: Subir Bhaumik, Senior Journalist

Chair and Moderator: Nasreen Chowdhory

Welcome Dinner

## February 5 2023: Day 2

9.00-11.00 a.m.: **Workshop Session I** (Only Workshop Participants)

“How to Tell an Arresting Tale”: Workshop on the essentials of researching and writing on the displaced”

Workshop facilitator: Zobaer Ahmed, DW and DW Akademie

Workshop Participants:

Annie Philip, Fakhira Najib, Sulochona Ramiah, Yoshitha Perera, Porimol Palma, Shihab Jishan Anik, Anwasha Banerjee, Tahir Khan, Danish Karokhel, Roksana Mohammed, Samata Biswas

(For Conference Participants: Excursions to Jawalakhel Tibetan Settlement, Atisha Primary School and Nepal Mahila Ekata Samaj)

11.30 a.m. - 1.00 p.m.: **Workshop Session II** (Only Workshop Participants)

Continuation of Workshop

1.00-2.00 p.m.: Lunch break

2.00-3.30 p.m.: **Conference Session 1** (all participants)

Vulnerabilities and Migration in the South Asian Mediascape (World Café)

Facilitators: Andrea Marshall, Eva Garcke, Lina Elter

As laid out in the concept note of the conference, the network recognizes that within larger news reporting concerned with migration, certain sections get less or no attention—sections which we are choosing to call (hierarchies of) vulnerabilities. This also signals that the hierarchies are changing and shifting. The hierarchies may be structural, biological/ physical, locational, economic—each deepening with crisis and displacement. Which vulnerabilities in migration and displacement settings remain unaddressed in the media, and how may we best represent them? This discussion will revolve under four focal points: Gender, Identity, Climate and Labour and would be joined by Nasreen Chowdhory, Fakhira Najib, Roksana Mohammed and Som Prasad Lamichhane.

3.30 p.m. to 4.00 p.m.: Tea Break

4.00-5.30 p.m.: **Conference Session 2**

Nepal in Focus: At the Intersection of Vulnerabilities

More than 70 migrant workers from Nepal have perished during the months leading up to the Qatar world cup, 7500 migrant workers since 2008. Nepal continues to be one of the largest labor migrant producing countries in the region—relying heavily on remittances. The delicate and diverse ecology of Nepal, various development and agricultural projects, the 2015 earthquake etc. together make the contemporary migration situation in Nepal complex and multifaceted.

Chair: Som Niroula

Discussants: Ramu Sapkota, Som Prasad Lamichhane, Kamal Thapa Chhetri, Roshan Pokharel, Sujit Saxena

5.30-6.00 p.m.: **Conference Session 3 (Creative Session)**

Presentation of CRG exhibition “Trail of Blood: The Calcutta Killings of 1946 and Its Aftermath” by Curator Debasree Sarkar

Photographer Dipanwita Saha traces the Great Calcutta Killing of 1946 through images of archival records, news, locations and familial object, to signal the pre-history of one of the largest instances of forced migration in human history, the partition of the Indian subcontinent.

5.30-6.30 p.m.: **Conference Session 4**

Migration Issues in Independent Media

Participants in the South Asia Consultations lamented that newspapers and corporatized television networks neither have dedicated beats, nor do they regularly carry news about refugees and migrants. Would independent, digital and alternate media be instrumental in shaping the discourse?

Chair: Subir Bhaumik

Discussants: Yoshitha Pereira, Danish Karokhel, Asif Khan, Syed Junaid Hashmi, Mainul Khan, Rumky Farhana

**6 February, Day 3**

9.00-10.30 a.m.: **Workshop Session III Only (Workshop Participants)**

10.30 a.m. - 12.30 p.m.: **Conference Session 5 (all participants)**

Building and Strengthening the South Asia Network (interactive session with group work)

Introducing the Action Plan of the Network Members: Faruq Faisal and Said Nazir

Introducing the Network Statement: Samata Biswas

Group Work and Discussion about the Action Plan and the Network Statement: Facilitated by Eva Garcke, Andrea Marshall, Lina Elter

12.30-1.30 p.m.: **Conference Session 6**

Migrant Workers and the Media

Two instances in the recent past involving South Asian migrant workers ensured considerable media attention. First, the march of the migrant workers during Covid 19 lockdown in India, and second, the deaths of hundreds of migrant workers in the run up to Qatar football World Cup. Both instances point at the public apathy that surround the living and working conditions of internal and international migrant workers, becoming visible only in moments of spectacular disasters.

Chair: Samata Biswas

Discussants: Som Prasad Lamichhane, Porimol Palma, Matiur Rahaman, Annie Philip, Fakhar Hayat

Lunch: 1.30 pm – 2.30 pm

2.30-4.00 p.m.: **Conference Session 7**

Climate Catastrophe and News Reporting

The devastating floods in Pakistan (2022), the massive death toll, resulting displacement (both Pakistani citizens and Afghan refugees) highlights the global nature of climate catastrophe, in which poorer, tropical nations such as those in South Asia are forced to bear the brunt of extreme weather events, water level rise, increasing cyclones, glacial lake bursts, floods, drought, shoulder the massive environmental, financial and human burden of the global

carbon footprint. Climate catastrophe does not stop at national boundaries—the nations of South Asia together stand to lose the most in this crisis. However, media reporting in and of the region has substantially concentrated on spectacular and catastrophic events, not addressing connecting and recurring issues. Climate migration is a present threat for South Asia, with one study estimating 50 million climate refugees in Bangladesh itself by 2050. Which are the stories of climate migration that need to be told?

Chair: Neetu Pokharel

Discussants: Pallavi Sareen, Sandran Rubatheesan, Fakhira Najib, Zia ur Rehman, Tahir Khan

4.30–6.00 p.m.: **Conference Session 8 (Hybrid Session)**

Intersections of Vulnerabilities

How do complexities of refugee and migrant identities play out in dominant public discourse? With the participation of citizen journalists, and informed reporting, how does news reporting cater to the multiple intersectionalities in refugee and migrant subjects?

Chair: Subir Bhaumik

Discussants: Anwasha Banerjee, Nooria Bazwan (online), Mohammad Ibrahim(online), Sulochana Ramiah, Shihab Jishan Anik, Mafia Mukta

**7 February: Day 4**

9.00-10.00 a.m.: **Workshop Session IV**

10.00 a.m.-11.30 p.m.: **Concluding Session and Stock Taking**

# Conference Sessions

## Day One

### **Inaugural Session**



Nasreen Chowdhory and Dr. Thomas Prinz, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to Nepal, present the joint statement on the new regional network SAN-CDM South Asia Network of Communication, Displacement and Migration

The four-days long conference was held in Kathmandu, Nepal from 4 to 7 February. For the first time, SAN-CDM held an in-person conference with journalists, activists, students, researchers, and academicians working on labour and migration-related issues. Over the course of the four days, the conference was attended by 51 participants, from 6 South Asian nations and from Europe. Samata Biswas introduced the network to the audience and explained the need to raise the issues of displacement and vulnerabilities in the South Asia region, the interconnectedness of the region, and the scope for collaboration—prospects that the network will facilitate. Nasreen Chowdhory gave a brief introduction to CRG and also moderated the session. After that the



conference was inaugurated with a welcome address by the Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to Nepal Dr. Thomas Prinz. Andrea Marshall from DW Akademie enlightened the audience with the works of DW Akademie and Som Niroula delivered a welcome address on behalf of the Nepal Institute of Peace. The Keynote Address delivered by senior journalist Subir Bhaumik followed.



Senior Journalist Subir Bhaumik delivering the Keynote Address

Bhaumik eloquently described the contemporary crises we all are in, namely the problems of representational politics of the coveted media houses and how displacements are taking place without proper rehabilitation or integration systems, rehabilitation policies of the governments, and the problematics of defining climate change-induced displacements. He also highlighted the importance of interventions of the different media platforms to create a network of people who would cover the news with empathy and without external motivation. The need to move beyond spectacular instances of migration, and instead, focus on silent migrations taking place across the region, the refugee eco-system, and the need for connected, cross-border tales, were emphasised



during the lecture. A spirited discussion, moderated by Nasreen Chowdhory, followed the lecture.



A group photo with the participants on the first day of the conference

## Day Two 05.02.2023

### Excursions

The conference participants were divided into two groups, – the first group went to visit the Jawalakhel Tibetan Refugee Camp in Lalitpur which includes a Tibetan Co-operative Community Shop, to see their current living conditions. The second group visited a women’s organisation working in slums, the Nepal Mahila Ekta Samaj.



A welcome board outside a Tibetan Co-operative Community Shop

The camp was established in 1960. Till date, many of them are engaged in low paid manual labour and the traditional carpet weaving industry.



Women are mostly engaged in the weaving process.

From its time of inception, the Tibetan Co-operative is being sustained by the refugees themselves. The profit from these shops provide help to the refugee community. This group also visited the Atisha Primary School which is a primary school sponsored by Anker Fur Nepal. The main purpose of establishing the school was to provide modern education along with preservation and promotion of Tibetan cultural heritage and language.





Conference participants with teachers of Atisha Primary School in front of the school building.

The second group of participants visited the Nepal Mahila Ekata Samaj (NMES), an organisation of landless (squatter and informal settlement) women scattered throughout 40 districts of Nepal. It started functioning as a loose network of women by acknowledging the problems and discrimination caused by the society. Since its inception, the organization has been advocating for the rights of landless women who are suffering from forceful migration, deprived of citizenship, and victimized because of the hierarchies of society's patriarchal structure. The conference participants engaged in spirited discussions with the members of this organisation, and left with an enhanced understanding of displaced women's issues in Nepal.



Women of the NMES



Conference participants at the NMES., with Som Niroula (NIP) facilitating the discussion.



## Conference Session 1

# Vulnerabilities and Migration in the South Asian Mediascape (World Café)

Facilitators: Andrea Marshall, Eva Garcke, Lina Elter



Nasreen Chowdhory leading the gender focal discussion as part of the World Café session

In this session, the participants talked about the continuous shifts in the nature of hierarchies. The participants, through their own locational, biological/physical, economic position pointed out the different levels of vulnerabilities of hierarchies that may be crucial to contribute in deepening the crisis with the process of displacement. Gender, Identity, Climate, and Labour were in focus and participants Fakhira Najib, Roksana Mohammed, Nasreen Chowdhory, and Som Prasad Lamichhane acted as focal points guiding and developing the discussion. They raised some important questions. for example, how the difference in legal infrastructure for refugees in respective countries makes them more vulnerable if they are displaced without proper knowledge of the existing legal system. Also, the need of having labour unions as a reliable network for the labour migrants in the time of crises was pointed out. Fakhira Najeeb discussed how media can better portray the vulnerability of populations

and the role aspects of identity play in this process. Among other topics, participants discussed reporting challenges and, above all, how to collaborate more closely. The conference was the first opportunity for members of the newly founded SAN-CDM and other interested people to get to know each other in person and the World Café Session helped that process.



Som Prasad Lamichhane leading the Labour Focal Point of the Discussion

## Conference Session 2

### Nepal in Focus: At the Intersection of Vulnerabilities

Chair: Som Niroula

Discussants: Ramu Sapkota, Som Prasad Lamichhane, Kamal Thapa Chhetri, Roshan Pokharel, Sujit Saxena



Panelists sharing their insights on the condition of Nepal at the intersection of vulnerabilities

The moderator, Som Prasad Niroula, led the discussion around different kinds of displacement and migration related vulnerabilities that Nepal regularly faces, due to political unrest, refugee situations in the region, geopolitical considerations, climate disaster and distress, as well as labour migration. Ramu Sapkota, an independent journalist, spoke about the different investigative stories he has done in the context of labour and returnee migration. Romesh Pokharel, a faculty at Tribhuvan University, has been working closely with Tibetan and Rohingya refugees in the city of Kathmandu—which embody challenges of widely different nature. Som Prasad Lamichhane, a former migrant worker in the Gulf region, and the current coordinator of Pravasi Nepali



Coordination Committee, delineated the multiple ways in which migrant workers of Nepalese origins are duped in transit and at their countries of destinations, as well as the challenges they encounter when trying to come back home. Kamal Thapa Chhetri is part of National Human Rights Commission, Nepal. Chetteri spoke about the different ways in which migrant workers' human rights may be violated and the stellar role that the NHRC, Nepal has played in safeguarding them. Sujit Saxena (NIP) has been mapping internal displacement in Nepal for several years now, he gave a comprehensive overview of the state of rehabilitation process of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Nepal. Apart from conflict induced displacement, people have been displaced due to natural disasters and development activities. Thousands of people of 14 districts of Nepal were displaced by an earthquake in 2015. Similarly every year thousands of people have been displaced due to flood and landslide. Apart from this, people are being displaced due to drying of sources of water in rural villages of hill districts. In recent years, increasing number of hydro dam and highways has also emerged as one of the causes of displacement of people in different parts of Nepal. The Government has drafted National Policies on Internal Displacement in 2007, which covers policies on all types of displacement, but it is yet to be implemented formally, and, thus, is only on paper. Saxena focuses on people who are displaced every year, due to natural disasters caused by climate change. He pointed out that the Government becomes active after the disaster, by arranging for relief and recovery, and then abandon the process of rehabilitation. There are number of displaced people living in tents waiting for the support of the Government for two to three years in different districts of Nepal.

## Conference Session 3 (Creative Session)

### Trail of Blood: The Calcutta Killings of 1946 and Its Aftermath



Presentation of the CRG exhibition “Trail of Blood” by Curator Debasree Sarkar

On 16th August 1946, as India headed towards partition, Calcutta witnessed its biggest Hindu-Muslim riot, which led to the death of more than 4000 people. This tragedy is known as the ‘Great Calcutta Killing’. It marked an apex point amidst the series of mass-scale communal violence leading towards the Partition of India. ‘Trail of Blood’ is an attempt to recreate those collective memories and to reconnect them with contemporary India. Photographer Dipanwita Saha traces the Great Calcutta Killing of 1946 through images of archival records, news, locations, and familial objects, to signal the pre-history of one of the largest instances of forced migration in human history, the partition of the Indian subcontinent.

## Conference Session 4

### Migration Issues in Independent Media

Chair: Subir Bhaumik

Discussants: Yoshitha Pereira, Danish Karokhel, Asif Khan, Syed Junaid Hashmi, Mainul Khan, Rumky Farhana



Subir Bhaumik sharing his views on the role of independent media in reporting migration issues

Modifying the title of the panel, Subir Bhaumik stressed upon the independence of the media in carrying out and reporting on stories of significance, related to refugee and migrant settings. Syed Junaid Hashmi actively uses Youtube and social media for his reporting. Social media, according to him, plays a key role in enabling previously unheard voices to be heard. In the aftermath of every catastrophic event, the displaced living in the camps and shelters are placed with more challenges — the risk of infectious diseases turning into reality in temporary shelter camps, permanent rehabilitation needing years to come by, etc. In each of these instances, the connectedness of the region gets highlighted in hindsight, but in reporting, or disaster management, national and state

boundaries are rigidly maintained. Questions like how can journalists understand the traditional biases and gaps in media reporting and create spaces for more inclusive and holistic news were raised. Yoshitha Periera from Sri Lanka noted that proper representation of stories can benefit people and communities. Yoshitha, apart from being a print journalist, is now also a visual story teller, Rokhsana Mohammed from Bangladesh opined that we need more reports dealing with migration issues within other stories. Mainul Khan had been at the receiving end of state- censorship and threat to his personhood as a result of his reporting activities. Mainul stressed on the role that the network could potentially play in amplifying journalists' voices, and expressing solidarity. Panellists, who are media practitioners from different South Asian countries, shared their experiences and the nature of obstacles they face while reporting news related with migration and displacement. Danish Karokhel, a displaced journalist himself, spoke about the difficulties of running his network from abroad, as well as the exciting and investigative work that they nevertheless put out. The ensuing discussion found the house deeply divided on issues related to social media and its intersection with news media, while the house remained united in their belief that regional issues across South Asia demand regional frameworks of address.

## Day 3

### Conference Session 5

#### **Building and Strengthening the South Asia Network (interactive session with group work)**

Introducing the Action Plan developed in the Regional Consultations: Faruq Faisel and Said Nazir

Introducing the Network Statement: Samata Biswas

Group Work and Discussion about the Action Plan and the Network Statement.

Facilitated by Eva Garcke, Andrea Marshall, Lina Elter



Samata Biswas introducing the Network Statement

In the discussion after Samata Biswas introduced the Network Statement, four points were proposed:

- i. the regional alliance SAN-CDM must strive to improve communication and reporting on displacement and migration in South Asia through cross-border interdisciplinary exchange.
- ii. as the South Asian countries share common challenges, Samata Biswas proposed that we focus on the similarities rather than the differences.
- iii. challenges arise while reporting on those who must leave their homes because of climate change catastrophes, such as drought, flooding, and overly salinized land. All of these have devastated areas of Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Nepal and experts predict that it will only worsen. The World Bank estimates that, by 2050, there will be some 50 million so-called “climate migrants” in South Asia annually. In reporting on this issue, media professionals often lack data so as to accurately convey the scale of the problem. The network can create a ground where information can be shared among the members so that they can have a clearer idea about the situation.
- iv. experts on displacement and migration in the region need to support one another and cooperate. There need to be appropriate platforms for all those impacted by these crises, and the media should publish and broadcast those voices. The new regional network SAN-CDM can provide important support in this regard.





## Conference Session 6

### Migrant Workers and the Media

Chair: Samata Biswas

Discussants: Som Prasad Lamichhane, Porimol Palma, Matiur Rahaman, Annie Philip, Fakhar Hayat



Samata Biswas giving her insightful remarks on Matiur Rahaman's presentation on migrant workers

Migrant labour is endemic across South Asia. The Nepalese alone account for hundreds of thousands of migrant workers abroad. They frequently end up in wealthy countries around the Persian Gulf, but also in Malaysia and Singapore. It's similar in Bangladesh. India both exports and imports migrant labourers and is home to many domestic labour migrants, as became evident during the COVID-19 crisis. Independent and responsible media are crucial to increase the visibility of refugees and migrants in public discourse. Stories were shared among panellists, which underscored the commonality of experiences across the region. Som Prasad Lamichhane from Nepal and Matiur Rahaman from



India pointed out the fact that stories across the borders are not so different after all. While Som is instrumental in bringing stranded migrant workers back to Nepal, Matiur has till date brought 42 dead bodies of migrant workers home. Both Porimol Palma and Fakhar Hayat discussed the difficulties of reporting on migrant workers in their countries of destination, the lack of access, the suspicion and the very real threat to the journalists trying to uncover instances of abuse and labour law violations. Annie Philip pointed out the stellar work done by Indian and international media in covering the exodus of migrant workers from the major Indian cities where they worked, during the COVID 19 lockdown.

## Conference Session 7

### Climate Catastrophe and News Reporting

Chair: Neetu Pokharel

Discussants: Pallavi Sareen, Sandran Rubatheesan, Fakhira Najib, Zia ur Rehman, Tahir Khan



Panelists discussing among themselves about the common threads of reporting on climate catastrophe

Panel members discussed the possibilities of how the participation of refugees and migrants in public discourse can be improved, and indicated ways to strengthen regional cooperation and cross-border approaches to address the common challenges faced by the media while reporting on migration and displacement in South Asian countries. They also discussed the current scenario of safety and protection measures offered by the governments to the displaced persons. Pallavi Sareen pointed out the collective responsibilities of the government, the media, and the environmentalists to prepare people for this kind of situations, to make them accountable, and to make them understand the precarious nature of the climate threat. Sandran Rubathesan stated why sustainable development needs to be in the priority list while making developmental policies and shared his thoughts on his recent reporting on Sri Lankan refugees languishing in Southern India for decades and how the

ongoing worst economic crisis in the island is forcing more Tamil people to take an unprotected passage across the Palk Straits in the recent weeks in the wake of increasing food insecurity in the country. Fakhira Najib, who is currently working as Program Manager on the “Displacement & Dialogue: Citizen Journalism for Afghan Refugees and Host Communities” project in Pakistan, spoke about her program “AWAZ-E-DOSTI”, and the scope it has in amplifying Afghan refugee voices while they live in Pakistan. Tahir Khan highlighted the problems of Afghan journalists while working in Pakistan. He stressed on the importance of new emerging media platforms to connect with the people who need help and how the displaced persons also can access these platforms to build a network of communication. Neetu Pokharel highlighted the burning issue of climate change that pushes for forced migration while many people are displaced due to climatic events. Tropical nations of South Asia are forced to bear the brunt of extreme weather events and water level rise while the Himalayan nation Nepal faces the problem of glacial lake outbursts, floods, and droughts in recent years. Therefore, she stressed on the importance of active participation of national and community based organizations to defend the rights of the displaced groups.

## Conference Session 8 (Hybrid Session)

### Intersections of Vulnerabilities

Chair: Subir Bhaumik

Discussants: Anwesha Banerjee, Nooria Bazwan (online), Mohammad Ibrahim (online), Sulochana Ramiah, Shihab Jishan Anik, Mafia Mukta



Mohammad Ibrahim (online) talking about the current scenario of refugee protection system in Bangladesh

Connected online with Mohammad Ibrahim, a refugee media maker currently settled in Bangladesh, and Nooria Bazwan, also a refugee media maker currently settled in Pakistan, this panel was centred on the question of refugees and migrants' voices being amplified in the mainstream media. On the basis of their work in Bangladesh, Shihab Jishan Anik and Mafia Mukta talked passionately about strategies and possibilities of enhancing refugee voices in the media, and the different programmes that have an impact on the media cycle. Anwesha Banerjee's concern with victims of trafficking and Sulochana Ramiah's ability to convince editors of the importance of migration news, showed certain ways forward to highlight and enable participation of refugees and migrants in media.

## Day 4

### Concluding Session and Stock Taking



Participants during the Concluding Session of the Conference

The concluding session included feedback on the network statement, reporting on the two excursions, and the key takeaways from the conference. There was a question on how the community created through this conference can be sustained long-term. Following are the suggestions given by the participants in the Concluding Session and Stalk Taking round:

- Subir Bhowmick pointed out that there are multiple challenges for SAN-CDM to become a reliable regional network. He suggested that SAN-CDM must bring in its fold the young collaborators and the displaced/vulnerables.
- Roshan Pokharel put emphasis on the network's multidisciplinary nature and called it "People's SAARC". For him, the main challenge is the digital divide among different countries.

- Danish Karokhel noted that the interaction among the participants was balanced and active. He asked for editorial direction from the network, as he is a journalist working in extremely volatile situations.
- Mainul Khan expressed his wish for the network to become a stable network of members providing more connectivity, more activity, and a free help-desk.
- Ramu Sapkota asked from his fellow participants for cross border collaborations on covering stories on the displaced and migrant labourers, a regular network newsletter, and a training programme on climate disaster management and safety guidelines for journalists or activists working on the field.
- Zobaer Ahmed put emphasis on the need of sustainability of the network.



# Workshop

As part of the conference, CRG also organised an interdisciplinary training workshop led by award winning journalist Zobaer Ahamed. Titled “How to Tell an Arresting Tale”: Workshop on the essentials of researching and writing on the displaced”, Shihab Jishan Anik, Anwasha Banerjee, Annie Philip, Sulochana Ramiah, Yoshitha Pereira, Tahir Khan, Danish Karokhel, Samata Biswas, Fakhira Najib, and Roksana Mohammed met in five sessions (one pre-conference, one post-conference, both online, and thrice physically during the conference). The participants discussed their research and story ideas with Zobaer and with each other, while Zoaber led them through the current and humane ways of reporting about refugees and migrants—through usage of technical terms and what they mean, the need to avoid sensationalisation and stereotyping, the importance of steering clear of dehumanising terms, as well as the importance of images in news-making. Led by Zoaber, the participants were also trained in the important guidelines and protocols involved in refugee status determination in the international context, the importance of collecting data on the same subject from different sources, the ethics of reporting, and the use of technology.



A picture of the concluding workshop session (online)

The participants also paired up to develop stories through international collaboration.

# Resolutions & Evaluation

As stated by Subir Bhaumick in the Concluding Session, the organisation of the workshop and conference as a platform to engage with issues of displacements and migration encouraged possibilities of new forms of collaboration crossing national boundaries. The participants responded positively to the structure and organisation of the workshop and conference and acknowledged that the events would leave a mark on their understanding of and approach towards climate issues and displacement. They mentioned that the panels and the connected discussions have been very fruitful.

Some of the common points highlighted by the participants were:

- ❖ The interdisciplinarity of the workshop and conference introduced many to approaches towards migration beyond their respective fields. They felt initiated to new perspectives beyond those they specialise in.
- ❖ Some participants acknowledged that the programme strengthened their theoretical understanding and conceptual clarity, which would aid them in their future endeavour when dealing with representation of the marginalised groups in any given situation, as the panel “Intersection of Vulnerabilities” helped them understand the hierarchies of vulnerabilities.
- ❖ Some participants, who are journalists coming from different South Asian countries, expressed having felt a sense of a collective at the event, where they found a space for shared narratives, understanding, and experience-sharing in the field of forced migration and reintegration of the displaced in the society.

After this, Samata Biswas made the concluding remarks and expressed hopes for sustained connections and future collaborations. Debasree Sarkar delivered the vote of thanks.

Further, to identify the critical factors that can contribute toward the stated goal, the evaluation has been done by Samata Biswas by her direct participant observation of the entirety of the three-day workshop and conference, a review of written materials in the conference, and her active participation in all the



workshop sessions, numerous informal discussions with participants, panellists, chairs, and other CRG staff, and an hour-long dedicated feedback session held at the end of the conference. The findings below are organised within a structure provided by the organising team from the CRG, reflecting their views of the critical aspects of the process and consistent with the collaborative nature of appreciative inquiry:

- i. Further opportunities for feedback and support beyond the workshop seemed plausible, which is exemplary.
- ii. The interactive nature of the conference/workshop sessions gave more ownership of the programme to all the participants.
- iii. Having a dedicated session for feedback within the programme was very helpful, giving participants more opportunity to feed into the further development of the programme and ensuring that all participants had the opportunity to share their views with each other.
- iv. Participants reported positive experiences of the online contact made by CRG to help them find the venue, process of the programme, and confidence to engage fully during the conference/workshop. The regular information provided via emails were considered helpful, and this clearly highlights the importance of ensuring that all participants are receiving emails to their correct address. Having the Media and Programme Officer as a point of contact for practical matters was considered very helpful.
- v. The range of themes addressed by the panels, and participants' papers/presentations, covered issues well beyond migration and arenas included employment, health and care, rural and urban development, and environmental protection, to name a few.
- vi. Discussion on the wider work of the CRG and DW Akademie and its partners was woven throughout the conference. For instance, the PPT presentation of the photo exhibition "Trail of Blood: The Calcutta

Killings and Its Aftermath”, which was a part of the conference’s Creative Session, was appreciated by the participants.

- vii. The inclusion of an excursion for the participants (excluding the workshop participants) within the conference was very positive. However, because of the large number of the conference participants, it was divided into two groups who went to two different types of places. Some of the participants commented that they would have liked to visit both the places and some workshop participants also expressed their desire to be part of such excursions. Most of the participants gave positive feedback on the excursions. One participant said that it was very helpful to know about the Tibetan refugees and s/he will use it in reporting. Another participant said that the way the Nepali refugee collectives/organizations work can be replicated in other projects. Another participant suggested that it would have been nice if s/he could spend more time on this – preferably a whole day.
- viii. Timekeeping by session chairs is always challenging, particularly when discussions are so rich, but overall there was a reasonable balance between exercising discretion to allow discussions to unfold organically and making sure we didn’t fall too far behind.
- ix. Some participants opined that the sessions were tightly packed-with back-to-back panels, leaving little time for participants to process the information. They suggested that the sessions could be wrapped up by 4.00 pm instead of extending it until late in the evening, which would also increase attendance in the last panels. Even though participants were given adequate breaks to both maintain energy levels and allow for informal discussion, leaving a little more room than what is needed for the breaks could allow it when some session needed to overrun its stipulated duration. Increasing the time of the breaks can be helpful in any such future endeavour.

Although some of this will no doubt happen organically and informally – and this might involve continuing support of all the stakeholders, with a continuously connected network members who are driven to the same cause, this might happen sooner than later with an evolving list of members, more resources, and a group of people trying to make a difference with their writing and activism.

## **Participants & Organisers**

### **List of Participants**

Andrea Marshall

Annie Philip

Anwasha Banerjee

Asif Khan

Debasree Sarkar

Eva Garcke

Fakhira Najib

Faruq Faisal

Jisan Paul

Kamal Thapa Kshetri

Kamala Panthi

Lina Elter

Mafia Mukta

Matiur Rahaman

Mohammad Ibrahim (online)

Muna Kunwar

Nasreen Chowdhory

Nooria Bazwan (online)

Pallavi Sareen

Porimol Palma

Roksana Mohammed  
Rumky Farhana  
Said Nazir  
Samata Biswas  
Sandran Rubatheesan  
Shihab Jishan Anik  
Som Niroula  
Som Prasad Lamicchane  
Subir Bhaumik  
Sujit Saxena  
Sulochana R. M.  
Syed Junaid Hashmi  
Syed Muhammad Fakhar Hayat  
Tahir Khan  
Yoshitha Perrera  
Zia ur Rehman  
Zobaer Ahmed

### **Organising Team (Calcutta Research Group)**

Debasree Sarkar  
Nasreen Chowdhory  
Samata Biswas

### **Organising Team (DW Akademie)**

Andrea Marshall  
Eva Garcke  
Lina Elter  
About DW Akademie

DW Akademie is the leading German agency for international media development, journalism training, and knowledge transfer. It is an integral part of Deutsche Welle, Germany's international broadcaster. The conference

was part of DW Akademie's project "Displacement and Dialogue South Asia" which is funded by the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development. <https://p.dw.com/p/46gcC>

## **Organising Team (Nepal Institute for Peace)**

Nitu Pokharel

Som Niroula

Sujit Saxena

About NIP:

NIP focuses on sensitizing, capacity building and participation in national development process without hatred and conflict. It covers a broad range of displacement and migration issues.

(<https://nipnepal.org.np/>)