

**International labour migration from Bangladesh:
A decent work perspective**

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International Labour Office
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Preface

Dr. Tasneem Siddiqui prepared this paper to serve as a basis for policy dialogue and for formulation of actions under the Bangladesh Decent Work Pilot Programme.

Bangladesh was one of eight countries that participated in the Decent Work Pilot Programme (2002-2005). The thematic focus of the national pilot programme, which was identified after several rounds of consultations between the social partners and the ILO, was globalisation and decent work – i.e., how could globalisation be better managed and harnessed by the country in order to maximise benefits and promote decent work, and minimize social and economic costs? Overseas employment is one of the major ways Bangladesh is integrated into the global economy. Remittances from Bangladeshis working in foreign labour markets amount to US\$ 1.7 billion/year, the biggest net inflow of foreign exchange.

While there has been substantial literature on international labour migration from Bangladesh, Dr. Siddiqui assessed the patterns and issues from a fresh perspective by using the decent work framework. In this paper, she proposes a number of policy and institutional measures to improve Bangladeshi workers' employment opportunities and redress problems they face.

Dr. Siddiqui presented the highlights of her paper at the National Policy Dialogue on Globalisation and Decent Work, held in Dhaka, April 2004, which aimed to initiate a broad-based dialogue on key issues among social partners and other major national stakeholders, elicit ideas on ways to address the issues, and consolidate support for the decent work pilot programme for action.

Her paper is being made available for wider circulation because it is relevant to the broader debate on international labour migration, particularly to current questions about labour standards and rights of overseas workers and governance over cross-border labour flows.

Dr. Siddiqui was a Professor of the Department of Political Science of the University of Dhaka, Chair of the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit, Bangladesh, and Chair of the Asia Pacific Migration Research Network, when she wrote this paper.

I would like to thank Mr. Manolo Abella, former Director of Migration Branch, ILO, for the technical support extended to the author.

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1. Introduction

The annual growth rate of the global migrant population increased from 1.2 per cent in 1965-1975 to 3 per cent in early 2000 (Abella, 2002). Among all kinds of migration, the movement of workers is the most dominant, accounting for almost 80 per cent of the total migrant population. The increase in the movement of labour is indicative of increased employment opportunity in the global market. Over recent years, migration has enabled many people to obtain productive, fulfilling and creative work. However, for many others, it has failed to provide jobs of acceptable quality. Instead, migration has resulted in inhumane work conditions, in which the basic labour rights of the workers are not respected.

Bangladesh is one of the major labour-sending countries of the world. Each year a large number of people voluntarily migrate overseas for both long- and short-term employment. This paper attempts to assess the current state and future potential of short-term international migration in creating decent work opportunities for migrants from Bangladesh. It highlights the key role played by migration in creating jobs for Bangladeshi workers and in making a major contribution to the economy of Bangladesh. However, the paper also focuses on the other side of this success story: the exploitation of many migrant workers both in the process of migration and in the migrant labour market and the problems which many of them face in realizing basic labour rights.

Conceptual framework

Decent work

The overarching goal of the International Labour Organization (ILO) is the promotion of social justice and internationally recognized human and labour rights. In recent years, the concept of decent work has emerged as the core concept of ILO in achieving this goal (ILO, 1999, 2001). The ILO defines decent work as productive work which generates an adequate income, in which rights are protected and where there is adequate social protection. In other words, it refers to a situation that promotes opportunities for men and women to obtain decent and productive work in conditions of freedom, equality, security and human dignity. The concept of decent work stands on four pillars: access to employment; promotion of rights at work; social protection; and social dialogue.

Employment is generally seen as the means of sustaining life and of meeting basic human needs. But it is also an activity through which individuals affirm their own identity, receive personal satisfaction and strive to make the fullest development of their potential and skills, thereby making a contribution to the common well-being. Therefore, employment should not be seen simply as access to any job, but rather access to a “full job of acceptable quality, productive in nature and freely chosen”. All those who work have *rights at work*. Every worker enjoys certain rights irrespective of his or her type of employment, whether in organized labour or not, in the formal or informal economy, at home, in the community or in the voluntary sector. *Social protection* refers to protection from vulnerabilities and contingencies that take people out of work. This includes old age, sickness, unemployment and loss of livelihood. *Social dialogue* is a process through which employers and employees resolve their differences

and ensure social equity. It is the means by which rights are defended, employment promoted and work secured.

The concept of decent work is relevant for all countries. However, depending on the stage of development, decent work standards may vary between countries at any given time. Decent work is also gaining currency as development and poverty reduction goals. The Millennium Declaration calls for global cooperation on strategies for decent and productive work for young people. Pope John Paul II supported a call for global coalition for decent work. And on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, South African President Thabo Mbeki affirmed that “(a) decent standard of living, adequate nutrition, health care, education and decent work for all are common goals for both the South and the North”¹. The UNDP *Human Development Report 2000* identified work without exploitation as one of the seven types of basic freedoms.

Migration

In this paper, short-term international labour migration is defined as the voluntary movement of people from one country to another for a certain period of time to achieve a better life or to earn a better livelihood. Employment is a major avenue through which migrants aspire to attain a better standard of living.

The scope of voluntary international migration in creating decent work can be analysed in terms of the four pillars of decent work: employment; rights at work; social protection; and social dialogue. The first indicator would be access to full employment, to wages that ensure a decent standard of living and to work that provides personal satisfaction. The second indicator would be the recognition of rights for individuals at work and the extent to which those rights are enjoyed in practice. The third indicator would constitute the arrangements for social protection that are in place. Finally, the fourth indicator would be the availability of mechanisms for employers and employees to negotiate and protect rights at work.

Sources of information

Over the last five years, some important empirical research studies have been conducted on international migration. This paper draws on the findings of some of these works² and on the proceedings of several conferences, seminars and

¹ Sighted in ILO 2001: *Reducing the Decent Work Deficit: A Global Challenge*, Geneva, ILO, page-12.

² S. R. Refaat Ahmed: *Forlorn Migrants: An International Legal Regime for Undocumented Migrant Workers* (UPL, 2000); T. Siddiqui: *Transcending Boundaries: Labour Migration of Women from Bangladesh* (UPL, 2001); INSTRAW and IOM: *Temporary Labour Migration of Women: Case Studies of Bangladesh and Sri Lanka (2000)*; T. Siddiqui (ed): *Beyond the Maze: Streamlining Labour Recruitment Process in Bangladesh* (RMMRU, 2002); T. Siddiqui and C. R. Abra: *Contribution of Returnees: An Analytical Survey of Post Return Experience* (UNDP and IOM, 2000) ; T. Siddiqui: *Migrant Workers' Remittances and Micro-finance in Bangladesh* (ILO, 2001); T. Blanchet: *Beyond the boundaries: A critical Look at Women Labour Migration* (USAID, 2002); T. Siddiqui: *Institutionalizing Diaspora Linkage: The Bangladeshis in the UK and the US* (Govt. of Bangladesh and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2003); T. Siddiqui and J. Sikdar: *Working Condition of Bangladeshi Factory Workers in the Middle Eastern Countries* (RMMRU and WARBE, 2004) Commissioned by the Solidarity Center, Sri Lanka.

workshops³. The paper is also based on interviews with officials of the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET)⁴ and with members of migrant workers' associations and on the outcome of stakeholder meetings with the Government, employers and trade unions.

Structure of the paper

This paper is divided into eight sections, including this introduction. Section 2 highlights the importance of labour migration to the economy of Bangladesh. Section 3 describes the different ministries and agencies involved in managing migration. This is followed by the international and national legal framework that governs the flow of overseas labour migration, workers' access to overseas employment opportunities, rights at work, social protection and means for social dialogue (Section 4). Section 5 focuses on the nature and characteristics of overseas employment that Bangladeshis have gained access to and other jobs that have been created as a result of labour migration. Section 6 analyses the level of social protection available to migrants and Section 7 reviews the actual and potential role of trade unions and other civil society organizations in articulating and representing the interests of migrant workers and providing the vehicle for social dialogue between employers and Bangladeshi migrant employees. Section 8 draws conclusions on major policy challenges and offers some recommendations.

2. Importance of short-term migration to the national economy

Labour migration plays a vital role in the economy of Bangladesh which has a very narrow export base. Ready-made garments, frozen fish, jute, leather and tea account for four-fifths of its export earnings. Currently, garments manufacturing is treated as the highest foreign exchange earning sector of the country (US\$4.583 billion in 2003). However, if this is adjusted for the cost of imports of raw material, then the net earning from migrant workers' remittances is higher than that of the garments sector. In 2003, net export earnings from ready-made garments (RMG) were estimated to be between US\$2.29 billion and

³Over the past few years a number of conferences, seminars and workshops have been organized on international labour migration. These include: a workshop on *National Responsibility towards the Migrant Workers*, organized by RMMRU, Dec 1997; a conference on *Temporary Migrant Workers of Bangladesh: Towards Developing a National Plan of Action*, organized by RMMRU in collaboration with the Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association, April 1999; a consultative meeting on the *Need for the Ratification of International Convention on the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families* by RMMRU, Feb 2000; a symposium on *Short-term Labour Migration of Women from Bangladesh*, by RMMRU, Nov 2000; a workshop on *Remittance and Micro-finance in Bangladesh*, by ILO, May 2001; three two-day *Awareness Campaign Workshops on Labour Migration Process for Community Leaders and Activists* by RMMRU, April, Nov 2001 and May 2002; a *National Consultation Workshop* organized by IOM, Nov 2002; a regional conference on *Migration, Development and Pro-Poor Policy Choices*, jointly organized by DFID, UK and RMMRU, June 2003 in Dhaka.

⁴ The executing agency of the Bangladesh Government Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment.

US\$2.52 billion, whereas net earnings from remittances was US\$3.063 billion. In fact, since the 1980s, contrary to popular belief, remittances sent by migrant workers have played a much greater role in sustaining the economy of Bangladesh than the garments sector.⁵

During the period 1977-1998, the annual average contribution of remittances was 26.5 per cent (Siddiqui and Abrar, 2001). This has been used in financing the import of capital goods and raw materials for industrial development. In 1998-1999, 22 per cent of the official import bill was financed by remittances (Afsar, 2000; Murshid, 2000). The steady flow of remittances has resolved the problem of foreign exchange constraints, improved the balance of payments and helped increase the supply of national savings (Quibria, 1986). In the year 2000, total amount of remittances was equivalent to 50 per cent of the country's development budget. The Government of Bangladesh treats foreign aid (concessional loans and grants) as an important resource base for the country. However, the amount Bangladesh received through remittances last year was twice that of foreign aid.

The contribution of remittances to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has also grown from a meagre 1 per cent in 1977-1978 to 5.2 per cent in 1982-83. During the 1990s, the ratio hovered around 4 per cent. However, if the unofficial flow of remittances is taken into account, the total contribution of remittances to GDP would certainly be much higher. Murshid (2000) finds that an increase of BDT (Bangladesh Taka) 1 in remittances would result in an increase in national income of BDT 3.33⁶.

In view of the post-MFA threats on the export garments industry, the importance of labour migration as a foreign exchange and job generator can hardly be overemphasized.

3. Managing migration: The Institutional framework

Labour recruitment from Bangladesh involves various government ministries and agencies; private recruiting agents and their local and international intermediaries; and potential migrants and their families.

Ministries

There are five key government ministries which deal with international labour migration: the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment; the Ministry of Home Affairs; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the Ministry of Finance; and the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism. Until 2001, the Ministry of Labour and Employment was in charge of international labour migration. Then in December 2001, the current Government established a new ministry in response to demands from expatriate Bangladeshis and migrant

⁵ Quoted in T.Siddiqui (ed) 2002, op.cit., p. 53. Speech delivered by Professor Wahiduddin Mahmud, former Advisor to the Interim Government of Bangladesh in 1996, at a conference on 'Streamlining Labour Recruitment Process in Bangladesh for Employment Abroad', 24 September 2001.

⁶ United States Dollar (USD) 1 is equivalent to BDT 63.70.

workers. This new ministry – the Ministry of Expatriates’ Welfare and Overseas Employment – is responsible for implementing the rules framed in 2002 under the Emigration Ordinance 1982⁷ and, accordingly, for promoting, monitoring and regulating the migration sector. Its activities are concentrated in two broad areas: firstly, to create overseas employment opportunities and secondly, to address problems experienced by expatriates and to ensure their welfare (Govt. of Bangladesh, 2003).

The role of foreign missions is also extremely important in respect to migration. The Bangladesh missions abroad have the following tasks regarding labour migration: (a) exploring the potential labour market; (b) attestation of documents pertaining to recruitment; (c) providing consular services for Bangladeshi workers; and (d) ensuring the welfare of migrant workers.

Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET)

The BMET is the executing agency of the Ministry of Expatriates’ Welfare and Overseas Employment in respect to processing labour migration. The BMET was created in 1976 by the Government to ensure maximum benefit from labour migration to the national economy. Since the promulgation of the Emigration Ordinance of 1982, it has been working as the implementing agency of the Ordinance. Currently BMET is responsible for a wide range of functions including: control and regulation of recruiting agents; collection and analysis of labour market information; registration of job seekers for local and foreign employment; development and implementation of training programmes in response to specific labour needs both in the national and international labour market; development of apprentice and in-plant programmes within existing industries; organizing pre-departure briefing sessions; and resolving legal disputes.

Private recruiting agencies

In the 1970s, the government was responsible for carrying out the functions of recruitment. However, since 1981, this role has been carried out by private recruiting agents, as part of private sector development. The private agencies work under licence from the government. On their own initiative, they collect information on demand and orders for foreign employment. After obtaining permission from the BMET, the agencies recruit workers as per the specifications of the foreign employers and then execute the procedures involved in their deployment. Over time, the recruiting agencies became organized under the Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (BAIRA). This association was formed in December 1984 with representatives of 23 recruiting agencies. By 2002, the association had a membership of around 700 agencies.

⁷ The rules framed in 2002 are: Emigration Rules; Rules for Conduct and Licensing Recruiting Agencies; and Rules for Wage Earners’ Welfare Fund.

Bangladesh Overseas Employment Services Limited (BOESL)

In 1984, the then Government also established the Bangladesh Overseas Employment Services Limited (BOESL) as a limited company to take on a direct recruitment role. By February 1999, BOESL had recruited a total of 8,900 workers i.e., 0.31 per cent of the total number of those who went overseas through the official channel (Table 3).

Individual contracts

About 55-60 per cent of recruitment is conducted through individual initiatives and social networks. Usually, persons already deployed in the host countries arrange visas for their friends and relatives through their own contacts. Sometimes these visas are sold to interested parties. Those who obtain a visa through this process pay less than those who pass through formal recruiting agents. The risk of fraudulent practices in the former is also considered to be less compared to the latter (Siddiqui, 2002).

4. Legal and regulatory framework of labour migration

This section examines the legal and regulatory framework that governs migration – focusing on the rights that exist for Bangladeshi migrant workers and the extent to which these are enjoyed in practice. It identifies three sources of rights at work for short-term migrants from Bangladesh: international instruments; the laws of both the countries of destination and Bangladesh; and bilateral agreements between Bangladesh and the receiving countries.

Sources of rights

International instruments

The ILO is the longest-established organization dealing with migration of labour. The first session of the International Labour Conference in 1919 highlighted the issue of equality of treatment between nationals and migrant workers, and the coordination of migration policies between states on the one hand and between government, employers' and workers' organizations on the other (ILO 2001). The most important of the ILO instruments relating to migrant workers are: the Migration to Employment Convention (Revised) 1949 (No. 97); the Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1975 (No. 143); and the Migrant Workers Recommendations (No. 151). Convention No. 97 came into force in 1952 and Convention No. 143 in 1978.

The 1990 UN International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (ICMW) is the most comprehensive instrument relating to migrant workers. It ensures rights to both regular and irregular, and male and female migrants. It affirms that migrants are both social and economic beings. It is important to note that none of the Bangladesh labour-receiving countries has ratified the ILO Conventions or the 1990 UN Convention on migration. Bangladesh itself has not ratified the ILO

Conventions. And although it has signed the UN Convention, it has not yet ratified this. Therefore, migrant workers from Bangladesh cannot receive protection through these international instruments.

National instruments

In order to manage and provide better protection to the migrants, a number of different measures have been introduced by successive governments in Bangladesh, including new ordinances, statutory regulatory orders and framed rules.

The Emigration Ordinance, 1982

In 1982, the then Government promulgated an Emigration Ordinance, which is the key regulatory instrument in relation to migration. Under the terms of the Ordinance, only those with valid travel documents are allowed to emigrate. A letter of appointment or work permit from a foreign employer or an employment or emigration visa from a foreign government is considered to be a valid document (Sec. 7/3/a). A person who is selected by a foreign employer through an organization or a recruiting agent recognized by the government under an agreement between the two governments will also be allowed to emigrate (Sec. 7/3/b). The Ordinance also empowers the government, in the public interest, to prohibit the emigration of persons of a particular occupation, profession, vocation or qualification (Sec. 8/1). Under the Ordinance, the government is authorized to grant licences to individuals and companies who wish to be engaged in recruitment for overseas employment (Sec. 10), and to cancel or suspend licences and withhold repayment of the security deposit if it is satisfied that the licensee's conduct has been improper or is in violation of the law or prescribed Code of Conduct. However, such actions can only be taken after the licensee has been given an opportunity to explain his/her position (Sec. 14/1). Illegal emigrations are punishable by a term of up to one year in prison and a maximum fine of BDT 5,000. The Ordinance also contains provisions for penalizing unlawful recruitment (Sec. 20) and recruiting agencies are prohibited from charging more than the prescribed amount of fees for their services (Sec. 23). In addition, there are provisions for penalizing individuals who, in breach of their contract with foreign employers, abandon their employment (Sec. 24).

Statutory and Regulatory Orders

On 11 April 1983, by a notification⁸ of the Labour and Manpower Ministry, the then Government set up four Special Courts in each of the divisions of the country (Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna and Rajshahi). Subsequently, on 25 March 1985, by another Order⁹ the Director General of BMET, managers of employment exchanges and assistant directors of district employment and manpower offices were authorized to lodge complaints to the Special Courts.

⁸ No. SRO 129-L/83/LMVIII/(11)83

⁹ No. SRO. 146-1/L/LM/S-VII/M-17/83

Migration of women

In 1981, the then Government issued a circular imposing a ban on the migration of all categories of female workers other than professionals. In 1987, the ban was replaced by the imposition of restrictions on the migration of women of unskilled and semi-skilled categories. In 1997, a ban was again imposed on all categories of woman workers, including professionals. Later the same year this was changed from a ban to restrictions, from which professionals were excluded. In 2003, the present Government eased the restrictions on the migration of unskilled and semi-skilled women over 35. However, those under 35 are still not allowed to migrate on their own.

Rules framed

In December 2002, the present Government framed three rules under the 1982 Ordinance: Emigration Rules; Rules for Conduct and Licensing Recruiting Agencies; and Rules for Wage Earners' Welfare Fund.

In the absence of the ratification of international instruments by the receiving countries and Bangladesh, bilateral agreements or memoranda of understanding are important instruments through which protection of the rights of migrants can be ensured. Other important labour-sending countries also laid great emphasis on signing such agreements with the labour-receiving countries. Successive Bangladesh governments have also sent high-level delegations to various labour-receiving states to negotiate such agreements. However, there has been a general reluctance among labour-receiving countries to sign bilateral agreements or memoranda of understanding that are legally binding. In response, the Bangladesh government has developed a minimum set of standards for its overseas workers. This includes wage scales, working and living conditions, gratuity, medical facility, and compensation. When an understanding is reached with any country for sending labour, the Bangladesh government then hands over the set of standards with the implicit understanding that the receiving country will honour it. However, this does not place the country concerned under any legal obligation.

In the past, Bangladesh has signed agreements with Iraq, Libya, Qatar and Malaysia on sending labour. In these instances, the Government handed over the expected minimum set of standards to the governments of those countries. For the first time, in 2003, the Government of Bangladesh signed a memorandum of understanding with Malaysia, under which Malaysia would take 50,000 workers over the years 2004 and 2005. In addition to setting out the number of workers to be employed over the stipulated period, the agreement also laid down rights at work (i.e., wage scales, working and living conditions); level of social protection (i.e., provident fund, gratuity, medical care and compensation); and access to instruments of social dialogue (freedom of association).

During the Asian financial crisis, the Malaysian government imposed a ban on receiving labour. When the financial crisis ended, the ban was lifted but Malaysia announced that over the next five years it would only be receiving labour from certain countries, Bangladesh excluded. A new labour-sending country – Nepal – was added to the list. However, Malaysia was an important labour market for Bangladesh, which the Government did not want to lose. As a result of major efforts at various levels, Bangladesh succeeded in reaching agreement on the resumption of migration to Malaysia. New terms were negotiated stipulating higher wages. However, the new agreement imposes tough

restrictions on migrant workers, including a ban on changing jobs and marrying local women, and requires the Bangladesh government to repatriate any migrant workers in breach of the contract.

5. Employment opportunities – Patterns and trends

This section describes the nature and extent of employment created through short-term international migration. It starts with a discussion on the total number of jobs created by overseas migration. This is followed by identification of the main countries of destination, the type of employment, the gender distribution of the migrants, their age and level of educational attainment and the flow of remittances through them.

Extent of employment

BMET¹⁰ data show that from 1976 to July 2003, over 3 million Bangladeshis worked abroad as short-term migrants (Table 1). The data show a yearly average flow of around 214,098 from 1991 to 2002, with the highest number migrating in 1999 (268,182). A large number of Bangladeshis are also believed to have gone to the Middle East through unofficial channels. Overall, short-term migration has created employment for a large number of Bangladeshis.

Main destinations

The major countries of destination for short-term migrants from Bangladesh currently include: Bahrain, Brunei, Iran, Kuwait, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Malaysia, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, the Republic of Korea, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Saudi Arabia alone accounts for nearly one half of the total number of workers who have migrated from Bangladesh since 1976. However, the labour market for Bangladeshi migrant workers is not static. During the 1970s, for example, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran and the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya were some of the major destination countries. While Saudi Arabia has remained the top destination, Malaysia and the UAE also became important receivers. Malaysia used to be the second largest employer of Bangladeshi workers. However, since the Asian financial crisis of 1997, the number of Bangladeshis migrating to Malaysia has plummeted (see Table 1) and the UAE has taken its place.

Type of employment

BMET has classified short-term migrants to the Middle East and South-East Asia into four categories: professional, skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled. Doctors, engineers, teachers and nurses are considered as professional workers. Manufacturing or garment workers, drivers, computer operators and electricians are considered as skilled, while tailors and masons as semi-skilled. Housemaids, agricultural workers, hotel workers and menial labourers (e.g., cleaners, cart loaders, and carton pickers) are considered as unskilled workers. Table 2 shows

¹⁰ BMET, among other things, maintains records of migrants.

the percentage share of different skill categories of migrants from 1976 to 2003. Only a small proportion of migrants are professionals (4.40 per cent), 31 per cent of them are skilled, 16 per cent semi-skilled and 47 per cent are unskilled workers.

Sex ratio

BMET data also show that Bangladeshi migrant workers are predominantly men. From 1991 to 2003, a total of 2,754,693 people have migrated overseas for employment. Of these, only 17,512 were women (Table 4). During the period 1991-2003, women constituted less than 1 per cent of the total number of migrants from Bangladesh. During 1991-95, women accounted for 0.98 per cent of the total migrant flow, and in 1997 this was down to 0.76 per cent. Although the 1999 figure (0.14 per cent) suggests the stemming of the flow of female migration from Bangladesh, the figure rose to 0.67 per cent in 2003. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) (2000) and Siddiqui (2001) estimated that the number of female migrants might be 10 to 50 times more than the official figures.¹¹ One reason for this is the imposition since 1981 of government controls on the migration of unskilled and semi-skilled female workers. These have included an outright ban (from 1981 to 1987 and again, for a short time, in 1997), and at other times, a series of restrictions. Since 2003, the restrictions apply only to unskilled and semi-skilled women workers under the age of 35, who are not allowed to migrate on their own.

Age and educational level

The BMET data are not disaggregated by age or educational level. However, different micro-studies conducted in migrant-prone areas have shown that most of the migrants were young (15-30 years) when they first migrated (Siddiqui and Abrar, 2000; Afsar, 2000; Murshid, 2000) and a substantial majority were either illiterate or their educational background was limited to schooling from class one to Secondary School Certificate (SSC).

Flow of remittances

The Bangladesh Bank¹² documents remittance flows to Bangladesh from all over the world. These data show that the remittances sent by overseas wage earners have grown over time, increasing from a paltry US\$23.71 million in 1976 to US\$2617.92 million in 2002 (Table 5). However, the yearly growth rate of remittances is much less than the growth rate of the total number of migrant workers.¹³ Throughout the last 25 years, the remittance flows broadly indicate an

¹¹ This information is based on interviews with recruiting agents who process undocumented migration.

¹² The Central Bank of Bangladesh

¹³ In 1991, the flow of migrants increased 41.72 per cent, whereas remittances grew only 1.56 per cent compared to the previous year. Similarly, in 1994, the number of people who migrated overseas grew at a rate of 23.79 per cent whereas remittances grew only 14.31 per cent during that time. In 1997, the number of migrants increased 79 per cent compared to 1996 and remittance flow

average yearly increase of around 10 per cent. The main reason for the gap between the number of migrants and remittance flows is that in recent years Bangladesh has exported more unskilled and semi-skilled migrants, whose wages are rather low compared to those of previous skilled and professional workers. In addition, wage rates have fallen drastically over the past decade (Siddiqui and Abrar, 2001).

One half of the total remittances came from one country, Saudi Arabia. Over the years, the United States of America (USA) has become the second largest remittance-sending country. Even though the number of migrant workers is low in the USA, majority of the migrant workers there are professional or skilled workers and wages are higher¹⁴. Kuwait and the UAE are third and fourth. Short-term migrants use different methods in sending remittances, involving both official and unofficial channels. Officially, the transfer of remittances takes place through a demand draft issued by a bank or an exchange house; travellers' cheques; telegraphic transfer; postal order; account transfer; automatic teller machine (ATM) facilities; electronic transfer; or in kind.

Creation of domestic jobs

In addition to direct employment, migration has also indirectly contributed to the creation of employment. Recent studies (Siddiqui and Abrar 2001, Murshid 2000) have shown that the family members of migrants have used a portion of their remittances in generating income and employment. Siddiqui and Abrar found that 100 families from Tangail and Chittagong spent 11.24 per cent of their remittances in agricultural land purchase, 2.24 per cent in either paying off or taking out a mortgage on land for cultivation, 5 per cent was invested in micro- and small enterprises and another 3.5 per cent was utilized in savings, bonds and insurance. A further 7.19 per cent of the total remittance went into financing the migration of other household members (Table 6). In addition, the capacity of the migrants' families to buy consumer items helps sustain local small businesses and producers.

Meanwhile, demand for better management of migration has created jobs in the public sector as well. A new ministry has been created with a state minister, secretary and other associated staff. Forty-eight skill-training centres and the BMET are among the major agencies creating jobs in the public sector. The movement of migrants also has relevance in determining the size of the Ministry of Civil Aviation, and Customs and Immigration Departments. Migrants also constitute a majority of the customers of Biman Bangladesh airlines. The presence of airlines of the Gulf and South-East Asian countries has also created jobs for a large number of people. A powerful private sector has emerged, centered around the recruitment industry. Private recruiting agencies, their agents and sub-agents, travel agencies, medical centres and inter-state transportation

increased 12.52 per cent. In 1998, the increase in the number of migrants was 29 per cent while remittances grew by only 4.86 per cent.

¹⁴ The labour migration data available in Bangladesh is only of short-term labour migration. On the contrary, the remittance data available in Bangladesh is of remittance sent by both short-term and long-term migrants.

owners and workers all earn their livelihood through their involvement in processing migration¹⁵.

Section summary

The study reveals that short-term migration has been extremely successful in creating a large number of jobs for Bangladeshis. Along with the employment of workers overseas, it has also created jobs within Bangladesh. In the public sector a few agencies and a new ministry have been created to manage migration. The facilitation of migration has created jobs in the private sector as well.

Analysis of the nature of overseas jobs shows that the Bangladeshi migrant labour market is changing all the time. New countries of destination have emerged. And while a larger number of professionals and skilled workers used to migrate in the early years of short-term migration, Bangladesh has now created a niche in the unskilled and semi-skilled market. Over the years, the total value of remittances has increased in absolute terms, but the value of per capita remittances has declined. Overall, the remittances sent by migrants have a major impact on the national economy.

6. Protecting migrants' rights at work

The process of migration has become extremely complex over the years. For migrant workers, this complexity is continuously eroding their enjoyment of rights at work – a problem compounded by failure to ratify international instruments and bilateral agreements. The following sub-section outlines problems associated with the establishment of rights at work at three stages of migration.

Pre-departure

Procurement of work permits

The procurement of a work visa, the recruitment of the worker and receipt of emigration clearance are key steps in processing migration. Bangladesh mainly participates in the low-skilled and unskilled labour market and has recently been facing tough competition from the newly emerging labour- sending countries such as Nepal, Cambodia and Indonesia. Such competition among labour-sending countries is resulting in a continuous lowering of standards in the terms and conditions of work. Moreover, unemployment rates have increased in some of the labour-receiving countries. This has led to the formulation of a policy for the indigenization of the labour force. To discourage dependence on overseas labour, some of these countries have introduced a levy to be paid by the employer when they recruit foreign workers. However, these governments did not, at the same time, raise wage rates in an effort to encourage local workers to take up the unskilled jobs. Therefore local workers do not find these jobs attractive and there is a continuing need to import labour for certain types of

¹⁵ There are 700 licensed recruiting agencies, 10,000 sub-agents and around 1,350 travel agencies.

work. With competition for these jobs among the labour-sending countries, the employers found they could conveniently shift the government levy to the recruiting agencies of the labour-sending countries. As a result, the recruiting agencies not only receive no commission for supplying labour, they also have to purchase the visa from the employers by paying the fee that the employers are required to pay to the government.¹⁶

The buying and selling of the visa itself has become a profitable business for a certain group of people. A nexus of interest has developed among high-level state functionaries in the labour-receiving countries, their recruiting agents, a group of expatriate Bangladeshis and a section of Bangladeshi recruiting agents. As a result, it has become extremely difficult to secure a visa through what were formerly considered to be the regular channels. Now this nexus is involved in visa transaction through irregular practices. The visas are then put into auction to other agents who have less access to visas. It has become extremely difficult to take action against this group of people, who are often highly placed both socially and politically.¹⁷

System of *Dalals* (informal agents)

Recruiting agencies that purchase visas in turn take their profit margin and then sell the visas on to individual migrants. Almost all recruiting agencies are based in the capital city, Dhaka, since it is not financially viable to have offices throughout the country. The agencies recruit through a host of informal agents and sub-agents, who perform two key functions: the recruitment of workers and financial transactions. Recruitment at the grass-roots level is conducted verbally, with even payments made without a receipt. The *dalal* system has not been institutionalized. The *dalals* (informal agents) are not formally registered with the recruiting agents they serve and do not possess any formal identification documents. This has created a situation in which both recruiting agents and their sub-agents can commit fraud and evade responsibility. In the process, a good number of those who wish to migrate are cheated and lose a large part of their assets while processing migration.

Although the 1982 Ordinance empowered the government to cancel and suspend licenses and withhold repayment of the security deposit if it is satisfied that the licensee's conduct is improper or in violation of the law and the prescribed code of conduct, in the absence of any documentation, the government is unable to take action. In 2001, the then Interim Government prepared a strategy document, which recommended the recruitment of migrants through the establishment of a database, or by registering the *dalals* with the recruiting agents. However, these policy recommendations are yet to be made operational.

¹⁶ Lion Nazrul Islam, E.C member BAIRA, 2002

¹⁷ Statement of the representative of BAIRA at the Interagency Meeting organized by the Ministry of Labour on 12 August 2001 for the study on Streamlining Labour Recruitment Process in Bangladesh commissioned by the Ministry.

Issuance of passports

Studies have shown that a large number of migrants fall into the low literacy category. In many cases, they rely on the recruiting agents for issuance of their passports. The recruiting agents usually process a large number of passports at any given time. In some instances migrants do not even sign the passport application form. Instead, the employees of recruiting agents sign the forms on their behalf. As a result, migrants often find themselves in trouble in the receiving country, when their signatures do not match the signature in the passport. Meanwhile, some of the recruiting agents or sub-agents commit fraud in procuring the passports. There are occasions when a visa is sold to a worker other than the one to whom it was issued. When the person or his/her father's name does not match with the one in the passport, the migrant, for all practical purposes, becomes an undocumented worker.

Lack of access to information

Lack of access to information prior to migration places migrants in a vulnerable situation. When a person is unaware of their rights, it becomes almost impossible for them to assert those rights. While processing migration, they do not have access to the names of licensed recruiting agents and they do not understand the importance of keeping documentation. Before embarking on short-term contract migration, it is of critical importance that a migrant worker has at his/her disposal specific information about the country of destination: their rights and duties under the legal regime of the receiving country; cultural sensitivities; and the physical environment. However, the migrant worker is either oblivious to these issues or has to rely solely on information derived from verbal interaction with the *dalals*. The BMET conducts briefing programmes for workers recruited for Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Kuwait and the Republic of Korea. However, these briefing programmes last only two hours and the range of issues covered is limited.

Although there are various instruments and agencies in operation, the right of migrants to decent entry to a job overseas has proved to be difficult to achieve. There is a need to streamline the process of recruitment, ranging from procurement of the visa to sending workers overseas.

In the country of destination

Decent work entails certain basic conditions at work: a decent wage, working hours and accommodation. In addition, the right to relinquish a job or to change work, freedom of movement, the right to have a balance between work and family, and the right to leisure are parts of decent work.

Wages

A study¹⁸ is currently being conducted on the working conditions of Bangladeshi factory workers in countries in the Middle East. It is based on interviews with 100 recently returned migrants from seven countries: Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Of the migrants who have been

¹⁸ 'Work Condition of Bangladeshi Factory Workers in the Middle-Eastern Countries' by Tasneem Siddiqui and Jalaluddin Sikdar, commissioned by Solidarity Center, Sri Lanka.

interviewed for this ongoing study, 40 went to Saudi Arabia, where they worked in factory jobs including garment making, construction, plastics, leather processing, welding, tile-making, printing, glass-making, water purification, packaging and the manufacture of gold items. The average monthly wage for migrants who went to Saudi Arabia was BDT 10,873¹⁹ for males and BDT 5,425²⁰ for females. Twenty respondents went to the UAE, where most worked in the garments sector. The average monthly wage was BDT 6,721²¹ for males and BDT 5,803²² for females. Sixteen went to Kuwait and worked in the garments sector, food processing and furniture factories. Here the average monthly wage of male and female migrants was BDT 19,000²³ and BDT 6,861²⁴ respectively. In Qatar, Bahrain, Jordan and Oman, the migrants mostly worked in garment factories. The average monthly salary was about BDT 10,000²⁵ for males and about BDT 6,000²⁶ for females. This gives some idea of the wage structure for skilled and semi-skilled migrants.

Payment of wages

The study also looks at the regularity of payment of wages for migrant workers. Out of the 100 interviewed, 56 stated that they received their salaries regularly without any delay. However, 43 experienced delays in the payment of wages, varying from 10 days to 180 days. In one extreme case, a female migrant worker in the UAE did not receive any payment of wages throughout the entire year she worked in a garments factory.

Overtime

The same study also throws light on the practice of overtime worked by factory workers. The nature of jobs was such that 59 of the interviewees had to work overtime on a regular basis, 44 worked up to five hours' overtime and 15 worked up to eight hours. Of the 41 who did not do overtime, only 13 mentioned that either their work did not entail overtime or they chose not to work overtime. The rest (28) reported that they stayed for longer periods at work but that this work was not counted as overtime. This was because the targets set for completion each day were hard to reach within the stipulated eight-hour working day. As a result, they had to stay longer hours as a matter of routine in order to complete their daily work. When the migrants worked overtime during holidays, 10 of them were paid less than their basic wage and 21 of them were paid the equivalent of their basic wage as overtime. Thirteen received one and half times their basic wage and only seven received twice their basic wage as overtime.

¹⁹ USD 170.69

²⁰ USD 85.16

²¹ USD 105.51

²² USD 91.10

²³ USD 298.27

²⁴ USD 107.71

²⁵ USD 156.98

²⁶ USD 94.19

Officially, in most of the countries where Bangladeshis migrate, there was provision for payment of overtime at one and a half times the normal rate of pay during working days and twice the basic rate at weekends.

Holidays

Officially, the interviewees were required to work for six days with a one-day break every week - usually on Friday. However, as many as 27 interviewees said that they had to work on most of the holidays and could usually enjoy a weekend holiday only once or twice a month.

The above study gives some idea of wages, overtime and holiday conditions experienced by factory workers in the Gulf States. The situation among unskilled workers of course differed significantly from this. Rahim (2002) and Reza (2002) threw light on the work conditions of unskilled and semi-skilled workers in the Gulf region. In Saudi Arabia, during the early 1990s, the monthly wage for an unskilled worker was SAR (Saudi Arabian Rial) 600-800²⁷, a rate that has now fallen to SAR 250-400²⁸ (Rahim, 2002). In Kuwait, the monthly salary of unskilled workers ranged from KWD (Kuwaiti Dinar) 8-25²⁹ (Reza, 2002). A survey of the list of complaints to the BMET from returnee migrants shows that the majority of complaints were related to non-payment of wages.

Accommodation

Large companies and formal sectors provide accommodation to their employees in labour camps on the outskirts of the cities. In Singapore, in a typical situation, a large group of 20-25 workers are accommodated in small houses. Those who work in cleaning companies, or those who are on a free visa³⁰ or self-employed arrange their own accommodation. In most cases, employers provided accommodation for the female garment workers. Women who worked in factories lived in hostels, either within the factory premises or outside. Excessive heat was a major problem for some female migrants. In the UAE, women garment factory workers share their rooms with at least 18 co-workers (Afsar, 2000). Some women who worked as domestic workers were satisfied with their accommodation. They were given separate rooms and wardrobes in which to keep their belongings. Others who reported that they were made to sleep in kitchens said they had no privacy at all (Siddiqui, 2001).

²⁷ USD 161.25-215

²⁸ USD 67.19-107.50

²⁹ USD 27.48-85.88

³⁰ Sponsors bring out visa in Kuwait to import foreign workers. Sponsors may not need all the persons visas were issued for. After keeping the number of worker that is needed in his farm the sponsor releases the remaining workers in exchange of money to find work elsewhere. In Bangladesh this is known as 'free visa'.

Food

In the factories, food was generally provided by the employers. In the first few months, most of the workers – in particular the factory workers - had problems with regard to food. The food is usually served to suit the preference of the majority of the workers. As a result, the food served in most of the factories where Bangladeshi female migrants work was either Sri Lankan or Southern Indian. A few of the respondents cooked their own food occasionally (Siddiqui et al, 2004). Some of the domestic workers also faced problems with food. In many cases, the female head of household used to keep strict control over food. While some domestic workers were served stale food, others stated that food was abundant and they were allowed to eat as much as they wanted. In order to solve food-related problems, some employers made efforts to buy items which would allow the domestic workers to cook their own food (Siddiqui, 2001).

Changing jobs

Those who work at the low-skills end receive much lower wages than the national minimum rate. This encourages other employers of the receiving country to try to lure them away with a nominally higher wage rate. To reduce the scope for this kind of job change, the employers withhold all forms of documentation such as job contract, travel documents and passports from the migrant worker. In their negotiations with the government of Bangladesh, the receiving countries ensure that the occupational mobility of the labourers they are hiring is minimal. The 1982 Ordinance treats the return of overseas workers before finishing the contract as a punishable offence. Under such circumstances, the ability of migrant workers to assert rights in the labour market is restrained in many ways. Workers without documents in their possession have major problems in seeking legal redress when employers do not honour the conditions of contracts. The lack of possession of documents also curtails the right of migrant workers to move freely in the city of employment. In Malaysia, in particular, workers are routinely harassed by the law enforcement agencies in the event of a minor offence if they fail to produce any form of identification.

Contract substitution is another measure practiced by some employers, which curtails the rights of migrant workers. On arrival in the country of destination, workers are made to sign a second contract which includes reduced wages and lower living and working conditions. In some cases, workers are given a different job than that stipulated in the original contract. In Malaysia, some of the migrant workers end up working on plantations while their original contracts were to work in factories. In Saudi Arabia, workers are often hired as cooks and security guards and then sent to work as agricultural labourers. Because of the extreme hardships faced working on plantations and in the agricultural sector, a considerable number flee these jobs to seek other types of employment. Through the network of Bangladeshi workers, some of the migrants manage to obtain jobs with better terms and conditions. However, having left the jobs for which they had obtained visas, they become undocumented workers and vulnerable to many additional forms of exploitation.

The majority of unskilled and semi-skilled Bangladeshi workers did not have any knowledge about the labour laws of the countries to which they migrated. As a result, it is easy for employers to violate existing laws relating to wages and working and living conditions.

Section summary

This section shows that institutional arrangements to ensure rights at work for the Bangladeshi migrant workers are poor. Neither Bangladesh, nor the labour-receiving countries has ratified the international instruments on the rights of migrant workers. Successive Bangladesh governments have found it difficult to sign memoranda of understanding with the receiving countries. Meanwhile, the enactment of various laws at the national level since 1976, has failed to reduce the exploitation of potential migrants even in accessing work.

In comparison with unskilled workers, formal sector factory workers enjoy relatively better work conditions. However, there is still a large gap between the wages of male and female migrant factory workers, with studies showing that female workers receive much lower wages than their male counterparts. The salary of unskilled workers has fallen drastically both in the Gulf region and in South-East Asia. In addition, a considerable number of workers do not receive their wages on a regular basis and freedom to move from one job to another is restricted for both skilled and unskilled workers.

7. Social protection

Decent work provides for certain assurances against vulnerabilities when people are out of work i.e., social protection. This includes: protection of income to ensure subsistence during old age or during sudden loss of livelihood due to closure of organizations or retrenchment; and protection against loss of income due to sickness, accidents or death. Assurance of treatment during sickness and following accidents are also part of a decent work package. This section evaluates the different social protection measures available to migrant workers in overseas employment.

Social protection for migrant workers in the country of destination

Income protection

Protection of income for migrant workers in old age is not a new idea. The Nepali Gurkhas who served in the British Army enjoyed retirement benefits while living in their own villages. Today, short-term migrants also enjoy certain benefits, depending on the type of job they perform and the terms laid out in the job contracts. Professional and skilled workers working in the service sectors, government and banking enjoy various entitlement packages i.e., superannuation, gratuity and provident fund. However, such benefits are not equivalent to those enjoyed by nationals of those countries. Moreover, benefit structures for Asian migrants are not as generous as those for western migrants. Unskilled and semi-skilled workers in the formal sector enjoy benefits that are more structured than those available in the informal sector. For example, in Malaysia, for those who work in manufacturing industries, a part of their salary is deducted and then repaid at the end of the contract period.

Health care

Access to health care is also part of a social protection system. The level of health care available to migrant workers in the destination countries inevitably varies from one country to another. In Saudi Arabia, for example, under a government policy entitled “Health for All”, primary health care services are available in the major cities, irrespective of the workers’ legal status (Mannan, 2001). In the UAE and Bahrain, migrants can receive health care from the general hospitals. However, the costs of medicines and tests have to be borne by the migrants themselves. Some companies and factories have their own authorized medical service providers, which provide annual medical check-ups for migrant workers. In some cases, on the recommendation of their supervisor, the employer agrees to bear the cost of medical services. While in Malaysia and Singapore health care is covered under the terms of the job contract, in the Republic of Korea, the cost of health care is borne by the migrants themselves. In case of the regular migrants, accidents and unnatural deaths are covered through compensation packages in all these countries.

Enforcement

Although some form of social protection mechanisms exist in the labour-receiving countries, migrants go through a lot of hardship in obtaining them. In Malaysia, for example, the workers’ provident fund often remains with the employer. When their contracts end, time constraints often prevent migrant workers from completing all the paper work needed to withdraw the amount. Tenaganita, a Malaysian human rights organization, maintains that a large number of benefits have remained unclaimed or unpaid, in the hands of the employer. In both the Gulf States and South-East Asian countries, migrants are subjected to annual mandatory HIV/AIDS tests. If a worker is found to be HIV-positive, employers take no responsibility for treatment and the worker is deported. Women workers are also subjected to pregnancy tests. If found to be pregnant, they are sent back home or have abortions. Poor access to health care and unhealthy living and work conditions are reflected in diseases such as jaundice, gastric problems, skin diseases and tuberculosis. Migrants are also employed in hazardous and risky jobs – often resulting in accidents and, in some cases, death. Migrant workers complained about the lack of adequate safety measures on construction sites, in heavy machine operating factories and in factories where chemicals are used. Obtaining compensation can also be a painstaking process. In the event of accidental death, the worker’s family is entitled to compensation. In Saudi Arabia this can be up to rial 100,000. However, so far officials of Bangladeshi embassies or consulates have not negotiated any such compensation. Since 2001, changes in the law in Saudi Arabia require that a local lawyer must be employed and a relative of the deceased must be present in court before a claim for compensation can be considered (Rahim, 2002).

In the labour-receiving countries, disputes can be taken to labour courts for settlement. Reza (2002) points out that in Saudi Arabia, migrants have on occasion taken their employer to court with the help of the embassy. The labour court summons the employer, but it is the responsibility of the plaintiff to produce the employer before the court. However, the police are often unable to produce the employer. As a result, cases often remain pending for a long time. Between October 2001 and June 2003, the Bangladeshi missions abroad collected and handed over to the affected families BDT 216,860,682 in the form of salary due or death compensation for 902 migrant workers (Govt. of Bangladesh, 2003).

Social protection in Bangladesh for Bangladeshi migrant workers

In 1990, on the basis of the Emigration Ordinance of 1982, the Government of Bangladesh created a fund for ensuring the welfare of wage earners. The Wage Earners' Welfare Fund is funded through subscriptions from migrant workers; the interest earned on the deposit of licenses of recruiting agencies³¹; a surcharge of 10 per cent on the fees collected through Bangladesh missions abroad; and individual and institutional contributions. The subscriptions paid by migrant workers constitute the bulk of the Fund. These comprise a fee of BDT 100 per person under a group visa, BDT 300 for an individual visa with the attestation of the Bangladesh missions in the country concerned and BDT 800 for an individual unattested visa.

The Fund was created with eight specific objectives: (a) the establishment of a hostel-cum-briefing centre; (b) the organization of an orientation and briefing programme; (c) the establishment of a welfare desk at the airport; (d) the transfer of the bodies of deceased migrant workers; (e) providing assistance to sick, disabled and stranded migrant workers, (f) providing financial help to the families of deceased migrant workers; (g) providing legal assistance to the migrant workers through the embassies and (h) the establishment of a recreation club and information centre under the auspices of the Bangladesh missions abroad. Through another Circular, the government included two additional elements in the list of objectives: the establishment of hospitals and the reservation of beds in existing hospitals for migrant workers and their families; and the provision of education facilities for the children of migrant workers. The Circular also stated that, if necessary, the Fund could also be disbursed to schools where the children of migrant workers were studying.

Enforcement

The BMET reports that an increasing percentage of migrants are availing themselves of the two-hour pre-departure briefing sessions financed by the Wage Earners' Welfare Fund. The Government is also using the Fund to construct a multi-storey building for migrant workers. Meanwhile, at the national airport, two welfare desks have been set up at both the exit and arrival lounges to provide a one-stop service for migrant workers and an airport bus service for migrant

³¹ While taking license, a recruiting agency has to deposit BDT 16,00,000 with government. Of this, BDT 15,00,000 is security money that is refundable and BDT 100,000 is license fee that is non-refundable.

workers has also been introduced. In the event of the death of a migrant worker, his/her family currently receives a one-time grant of BDT 20,000 from the Wage Earners' Welfare Fund.

Section summary

In certain jobs, short-term migrant workers enjoy benefits that are redeemable at the end of the contract period. While professionals, skilled workers and semi-skilled workers³² usually receive such benefits, informal sector workers such as cleaners, grocery store workers, domestic workers and vendors do not. The contracts of the later groups do not include these rights. In most of the Middle Eastern countries, primary health care services are available free of charge in the public sector of major cities. However, the cost of medicines and tests has to be borne by either the workers or their employers. In Bangladesh, the Wage Earners' Welfare Fund has been created - mainly through subscriptions from migrants - in order to provide welfare services. The creation of the Fund by the Government is an innovative approach to providing a measure of social protection for migrant workers. However, use of Welfare Fund became quite controversial in the late 1990s. Very little share of the Fund was spent to directly benefit the migrant workers. The Comptroller and Auditor General of Bangladesh filed a case with the Bureau of Anti-Corruption (BAC) in the 2001. The Ministry for Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment framed rules in December 2002 to streamline the use of the Fund. The Fund is managed by a board comprising of officials of different ministries and representatives of private recruiting agents. Migrant workers on the civil society have no representation on the committee. The use of the fund needs to be made more transparent.

8. Social dialogue

Social dialogue is a process through which employers and employees resolve their differences in order to ensure social equity. Collective bargaining is the mechanism through which employees/workers assert their rights. Two types of institutions are operational: trade unions and associations. Trade unions are the institutions through which wage and other work conditions are negotiated and associations are the bodies that are used for fulfilling their cultural and social needs.

Trade unions

Trade unions have been in existence in Bangladesh for a long time. Today at least 20 are active in Bangladesh. However, a study (Siddiqui, Malik and Abrar, 1999) on trade unions and migrant workers show that these organizations have yet to associate themselves in any major way with migrant worker issues. The study, which involved interviews with the leaders of the main trade unions³³

³² Particularly those semi-skilled workers who are working in the manufacturing industry.

³³ The interviews involved leaders of: the Trade Union Centre (TUC), the Jatiya Sramik Federation, the Bangladesh Shangjukta Sramik Federation, the Bangladesh Free Trade Union Congress, the Bangladesh Sramik Kallyan Federation, the Bangladesh Jatiyatabadi Sramik Dal, the Jatiya Sramik

found that the trade union movement in Bangladesh was not well-informed about migrant worker issues. As a result, none of their manifestos or programmes of action had any reference to migrant workers. However, the trade unions surveyed felt strongly about the exploitation of Bangladeshi migrant workers. A number of trade union federations made representations to the Government following newspaper reports of the plight of Bangladeshi migrant workers in Malaysia following the economic crisis in the Asia region. Yet none of the unions has any exclusive support service for migrant workers.

There are some basic conceptual problems with regard to the involvement of trade unions with migrant worker issues. Trade unions are membership-based organizations. As such, they can legitimately represent those who are their members. However, it is difficult to locate outgoing migrant workers and convince them to become members of trade unions. Moreover, migrant workers reside in another country, where the Bangladeshi trade unions do not have any access. The scope for trade union activism is limited in the majority of the Bangladeshi labour-receiving countries of the Gulf region and South-East Asia. Trade unions do not exist in Saudi Arabia. And although Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Malaysia, and Singapore all have trade unions, Bangladeshis are not allowed to become members of those organizations. Elsewhere, there have been some contacts between Bangladeshi trade unions and trade unions in the Republic of Korea and Malaysia.

The gradual shrinking of the formal sector worldwide has thrown up new challenges for the trade union movement. An innovative response from the trade union movement would be to increase the scope of its work by widening its membership base to include the informal sector. In this context, migrant workers could be an important focus for the diversification of trade union work. Through their international affiliates such as the World Trade Union Congress, the World Federation of Trade Unions and the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, the Bangladeshi trade unions could pursue migrant worker issues at international fora.

Within Bangladesh, the trade union movement could play an important role in urging the Government to design and implement national policies for the protection and promotion of migrant workers' rights. By mobilizing their organizational structure, they can disseminate information about the improper practice of the recruiting agencies and about wages and conditions of employment overseas. In this way, potential migrants from the organized sector could be helped to make informed choices about whether to migrate. Similarly, the trade unions could also make migrant workers aware of their rights and obligations under the national and international labour standards of the receiving country.

Another potential area where trade unions could play an innovative role is in the reintegration of returning migrants in the labour market. On their return, migrant workers often bring in specialized skills. In the absence of any database for

Jote, the Jatiya Sramik League, the Bangladesh Trade Union Federation, the Bangladesh Independent Garments Union Federation, the Samajtantrik Sramik Front, the Bangladesh Jatiya Sramik League and the Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies.

returning migrants, the trade unions could take the initiative to help link up the migrant worker with a potential recruiter of his/her expertise. While such activities go beyond the trade unions' traditional role of collective bargaining, they could help ensure better choices of employment, better work and living conditions abroad, and better reintegration.

Migrants' associations at destination

In most of the labour-receiving countries, migrants have organized themselves into a wide range of different associations. Most of the associations are established by the Bangladeshi communities residing in a particular geographical location of a receiving country (state, district and city).³⁴ Associations are also formed on the basis of the district, thana, union or village of origin of the migrants.³⁵ In some cases, associations are also formed by different professional groups.³⁶ However, this trend of forming professional organisation is not widespread among the migrant workers.

Associations organize cultural programmes and observe the various national days of Bangladesh. They also provide various kinds of support services for the community members, such as finding suitable accommodation for newcomers and introducing them to markets that carry Bangladeshi food and other products. These services give the migrants a sense of belonging to a larger Bangladeshi entity. Social interaction among Bangladeshis is also helpful in sharing of work experiences and in learning from each other about "do's" and "don'ts" and the cultural sensitivities of the countries concerned. The Siddiqui and Abrar (2001) study found, for example, that the social networks helped the migrants gain access to easy methods for sending remittances.

Associations of returnee migrants in Bangladesh

Over recent years, three organizations have been established by returnee migrants: the Welfare Association of Bangladeshi Returnee Employees (WARBE); the Bangladesh Migrant Centre (BMC); and the Bangladesh Women Migrants' Association (BWMA). WARBE was formed in 1997. The association strives to become the spokesperson of the migrant workers, particularly with regard to realizing their rights. Since its inception, WARBE has played an important role in raising public awareness of the plight of the migrant workers and of the contribution they make. It has also consistently called for greater transparency in the use of the Wage Earners' Welfare Fund and for the inclusion of representatives of returnee workers in the management of the Fund.

³⁴ For example, the Bangladesh Society of the UAE.

³⁵ For example, the Chittagong Samity of Sharjah and the Patia Samity of Dubai.

³⁶ For example, the Association of Bangladesh Engineers in Saudi Arabia.

The BMC is the only organization of Bangladeshi migrant workers that is operational both in Bangladesh and in a receiving country, the Republic of Korea. It was established in the Korean industrial city of Ansan and provides support to Bangladeshi migrant workers in the Republic of Korea. The BMC has a close association with the Joint Committee of Migrant Workers in Korea (JCMK) and with the Ansan Migrant Shelter. The Centre has been successful in facilitating the recruitment of returnee migrants from the Republic of Korea with Korean companies operating in Export Processing Zones in Bangladesh.

The BWMA represents the female migrant workers of Tongi, Gazipur and Dhaka city and is involved in a campaign to persuade the Government to lift the restriction on the migration of unskilled women workers below the age of 35.

Section summary

The discussion above shows that the scope for Bangladeshi migrants to join trade unions in the receiving countries is limited. As a result, the mechanisms for social dialogue are almost non-existent. In most of the labour-receiving countries, migrants have developed their own associations. These associations provide effective services which help migrant workers adapt to the new socio-cultural milieu of the host countries. These associations also become an important source of information for the migrants and, to some extent, fulfill their cultural and social needs. The returnee migrants' associations currently operating in Bangladesh have played an important role in focusing on the rights of the migrant workers. With their first-hand knowledge, they can provide very effective services to both outgoing workers and returnees. However, they need support in order to strengthen their institutional capacity.

Trade unions can play an important role in ensuring the rights of migrants in processing migration before departure. They can also serve the workers by developing collaborative programmes with the trade unions of the receiving countries.

9. Major challenges and recommendations

The paper underscores the role of labour migration as a major employment generating sector for Bangladesh and its critical contribution to the economy. Migration has also been identified as one of the potential sectors for creating employment and earning foreign exchange following the expiry of the Multi-Fibre Agreement. However, the paper has also identified a number of major challenges that need to be addressed. This section highlights these challenges and makes recommendations on ways of addressing them.

Challenges

Employment opportunities

Although the Government of Bangladesh is committed to promoting short-term international migration, it does not have any planned programme for accessing the rapidly changing international labour market. As a result, systemic methods for collecting information on labour needs in the receiving countries and on training requirements are not in place.

Bangladeshi workers are mainly employed in the semi-skilled and unskilled end of the labour market, where increasing competition from newly emerging labour-sending countries has resulted in a decline in wages and other conditions of work. As a result, there has been a decrease in the level of per capita remittances.

The existing education curricula of Bangladesh have very little vocational content, which is a major obstacle in promoting skilled migration. Moreover, the educational background of those who are participating in the semi-skilled and unskilled job market is relatively poor.

Rights at work

Access to mobility and challenges at pre-departure phase

Although the current Government has attempted to ease female migration from Bangladesh, men and women do not yet enjoy equal access to participate in the international labour market.

The 1982 Ordinance has major shortcomings in making the recruitment industry accountable. Potential migrants face fraudulent practices at almost every stage of processing migration. Irregularity in the process of migration has resulted in an increase in undocumented migration from Bangladesh.

Challenges at destination

One of the major challenges of international labour migration is ensuring the rights of migrants in the country of destination. Neither Bangladesh nor its labour-receiving countries have ratified the relevant UN and ILO conventions. And Bangladesh has no bilateral agreements or memoranda of understanding with most of the countries involved. Another challenge is the need for institutional capacity-building to enable the foreign missions to provide services to Bangladeshi migrant workers.

Social protection

Unskilled and semi-skilled workers have little possibility of benefiting from social protection measures in the country of residence, as these measures are not covered by their contracts. Efforts to ensure the enforcement of these measures in the country of destination pose a major challenge for the government of Bangladesh.

Social dialogue

Bangladeshi trade unions have practical difficulties in working as an institution of collective bargaining in a country of destination. Although migrant workers' associations have emerged both within Bangladesh and in the countries of destination, they lack the institutional capacity needed to advocate for the establishment of voting rights and a voice in parliament. Moreover, they have no representation in the management of the Wage Earners' Welfare Fund, which has been created through their subscriptions.

Recommendations

Increasing access to employment

The government should commit adequate resources to the migration sector. The Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment should propose the allocation of resources equivalent to the value of 5 per cent of the annual remittances in order to organize services for migrant workers.

Many labour-receiving countries have projections and plans for future development projects and concomitant labour needs. These projections need to be analysed systematically, so that Bangladeshi workers can be trained to meet future overseas demand and marketed.

The Bangladesh missions in Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, the UAE and Kuwait should seek to draw the attention of concerned authorities of the respective countries to the negative consequences of work visa manipulation on both parties and urge them to take the necessary steps to halt this practice. The Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment should take the necessary legal and administrative actions against identified Bangladeshi procurers and middlemen engaged in the visa trade.

To ensure equal access for men and women to overseas employment, government restrictions on the migration of unskilled and semi-skilled women workers below the age of 35 should be rescinded (but this should be coupled with better information, pre-departure orientation, better support from Bangladeshi missions in countries of destinations).

To increase access to employment through migration, the costs of migration should be reduced, and access to credit on low interest should also be created. A bank could be established by allocating resources from the Wage Earners' Welfare Fund. This bank could give loans to the poor at reasonable rates of interest by keeping mortgages on land or other properties. Since the Wage Earners' Welfare Fund is a contributory fund of the migrant workers, their views should be taken into account by the government.³⁷

³⁷ Secretary General, Welfare Association of Repatriated Bangladeshi Employees, at the Stakeholders' Meeting, 20 March 2003.

The existing training institutes of the BMET should be upgraded in order to help increase skilled migration. The BMET also needs to extend its training outreach through joint ventures with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and private training institutes. In this respect, the BMET should disseminate information on the labour market to organizations that provide training and to NGOs. To ensure that the poor, both men and women, have access to such training, special scholarship programmes should be established. These measures will require a major allocation of resources.

Vocational training should be incorporated into mainstream primary and secondary school curricula and textbooks should include chapters on migration. In order to help improve communication skills, English should be introduced as a second language from the first grade.

Enhancing rights at work

The 1982 Ordinance should be replaced by rights-based legislation reflecting the 1990 UN Convention on the *Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of their Families* and other relevant ILO conventions.

The Bangladesh government has signed the 1990 Convention and, as a labour-sending country, it is in Bangladesh's interest to accede to this and other ILO instruments forthwith and to frame the necessary enabling national legislation.

Following the recommendation of the Interim Government of 2001, an advisory committee should be established forthwith. This should act as an inter-ministerial/inter-agency watchdog with legal authority to monitor the management of the migration process.

In an effort to reduce fraudulent practices experienced by migrants before departure, there is a need to create an employment exchange bureau or to regulate the *dalal* system. Information on how to ensure safe migration should be disseminated through the mass media as well as through interventions at the grassroots level.

The licence fee for private recruiting agents should be increased from BDT 600,000 to at least BDT 3,000,000. In addition, the renewal of licences should be contingent on performance. The BMET should renew the licences of those recruiting agencies that are able to process at least 50 cases in the previous year. At present, only government officials can lodge complaints against recruiting agents for violation of the provisions of the 1982 Ordinance. This should be changed to ensure that migrant workers have the right to seek redress directly.

Before embarking on short-term contract migration, migrant workers should receive pre-departure orientation training. This should include the dissemination of information about the destination country, general job conditions, and the rights and duties of migrant workers both under the legal regime of the country concerned and under international law. Instead of providing this training itself the government may decide to encourage selected specialized agencies, NGOs and migrant support groups to provide residential, pre-departure orientation training in different migrant-prone areas on a decentralized basis.

The BMET should concentrate on the regulation and monitoring of the international labour migration sector, rather than on implementing specific programmes.

The role of foreign missions in the labour-receiving countries should be redefined. Protection of the rights of migrant workers should be considered a priority concern. The government should consider establishing a migrant workers' resource centre (MWRC) in each of the major receiving countries within the premises of and under the administrative jurisdiction of the Bangladesh missions.

Bank officials should receive regularly training, be aware of the importance of migrant remittances and be motivated to make their services customer- friendly. Some policy changes are also needed at the macro-level. The Bangladesh Bank's policy of not allowing private banks to open overseas branches in cities where nationalized banks already have branches also needs to be reconsidered. In view of the constraints on opening new branches of nationalized commercial and private banks, the Grameen Bank and the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) – which have a total of 1200 offices — should be encouraged to get involved in the remittance transfer process (Siddiqui, 2001).

In an effort to ensure continuous employment and earnings on their return to Bangladesh, migrants should be informed about the need to save. To encourage small savers, proper incentive programmes should be established. This may involve offering bonds, shares and mutual funds at attractive rates. Migrant workers should also be informed about the various forms of saving instruments offered by government, non-governmental and private agencies. In this regard, existing legal requirements may be relaxed so that selected micro-finance institutions can mobilize the migrants' savings without providing credit.

The BMET should encourage NGOs and the private sector to offer special programmes for the economic reintegration of the returnees. This may include helping them gain access to: the formal banking sector; credit agencies for soft loans; land allotment on moderate terms; insurance schemes; and access to schemes organized under the Wage Earners' Welfare Fund.

Increasing social protection

Social protection measures relating to health, security and accidents should be specified in the job contracts of semi-skilled and unskilled workers. The pre-departure orientation training should explain in detail to the migrants all such entitlements.

The Bangladesh missions should inform the authorities of the receiving countries about the difficulties faced by claimants in view of the stringent conditions in place in certain countries in respect to claims for compensation. This issue needs to be pursued in liaison with other labour-sending countries.

The government of Bangladesh should also negotiate with the receiving countries ways of simplifying the procedure for receiving benefits that fall due at the end of the contract period, so that the migrant can begin to process the claim well in advance and collect the amount before his/her departure.

Information handouts on the health services available in the receiving countries should be prepared in Bangladesh and disseminated through the missions and various associations of migrant workers in those countries. Information should also be disseminated on HIV/AIDS.

The current practice of forced repatriation of migrant workers who contract a disease such as HIV/AIDS should be discontinued. The sending countries should jointly seek to convince the receiving countries that the cost of medical care should be borne by employers when such diseases are contracted in the destination country.

Enhancing the scope of social dialogue

Expert bodies and civil society organizations should organize consultation meetings with local trade unions to familiarize them with migrant worker issues – in particular on the exploitation of workers within Bangladesh during the migration processing phase and on the nature of the violation of the human rights and labour rights of migrant workers in the receiving countries. In this regard, a linkage should be established between trade unions and migrant workers' associations so that they can complement each other.

Trade unions should adopt innovative approaches to overcoming the problem of membership for serving migrants and make concerted efforts to develop links with the trade unions of the receiving countries. Trade unions should use international fora to campaign for the membership of migrants in the trade unions of the receiving countries.

Although returnee migrants' associations have performed extremely well, there is a need to strengthen their institutional capacity so they can have an even greater impact.

The government should give careful consideration to the issue of allowing migrants to exercise their voting rights. When nominating candidates for national elections, political parties should take into account the need to ensure representation for returnee migrants.

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Table 1: Percentage distribution of Bangladeshi migrant workers by country of destination (1976- Sept 2003)

| Country Year | Saudi Arabia | Kuwait | U.A.E | Qatar | Iraq | Libyan Arab Jamahiriya | Bahrain | Oman | Malaysia | Korea | Singapore | Others | Total |
|-----------------|-----------------|--------|-------|-------|-------|------------------------------|---------|-------|----------|-------|-----------|--------|---------|
| 1976 | 3.56 | 10.56 | 32.68 | 20.06 | 9.64 | 2.84 | 5.50 | 1.86 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 13.29 | 6087 |
| 1977 | 8.77 | 8.36 | 37 | 14.38 | 7.87 | 4.57 | 5.53 | 9.49 | | | | 4.02 | 15725 |
| 1978 | 14.08 | 9.16 | 32.93 | 5.71 | 6.37 | 10.5 | 3.34 | 12.61 | 0.10 | | | 4.51 | 22809 |
| 1997 | 26.44 | 9.38 | 20.69 | 5.65 | 9.65 | 8.04 | 3.38 | 15.42 | | | 0.45 | 0.91 | 24495 |
| 1980 | 28.91 | 12.26 | 16.12 | 4.84 | 6.41 | 9.90 | 4.49 | 15.78 | 0.01 | 0.00 | 1.28 | 0.01 | 30073 |
| 1981 | 23.99 | 9.79 | 11.50 | 4.07 | 23.58 | 7.46 | 2.50 | 13.18 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 1.94 | 1.99 | 55787 |
| 1982 | 25.96 | 11.54 | 10.93 | 9.96 | 20.55 | 3.30 | 3.25 | 13.14 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.53 | 0.83 | 62762 |
| 1983 | 21.83 | 17.36 | 11.17 | 12.76 | 8.33 | 3.73 | 4.18 | 18.76 | 0.04 | 0.00 | 0.30 | 1.54 | 59220 |
| 1984 | 35.97 | 9.92 | 9.14 | 4.81 | 8.29 | 5.97 | 4.06 | 18.42 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 1.27 | 2.16 | 56714 |
| 1985 | 47.79 | 9.50 | 10.73 | 6.12 | 6.50 | 1.95 | 3.82 | 11.86 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 1.02 | 0.71 | 77694 |
| 1986 | 39.67 | 14.98 | 12.80 | 7.06 | 6.89 | 4.53 | 3.78 | 9.11 | 0.77 | 0.00 | 0.04 | 0.37 | 68658 |
| 1987 | 53.09 | 12.91 | 13.45 | 7.96 | 5.20 | 3.07 | 2.78 | 0.59 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.96 | 74017 |
| 1988 | 40.55 | 9.58 | 19.73 | 10.85 | 6.15 | 4.05 | 4.80 | 3.26 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 1.04 | 68121 |
| 1989 | 39.27 | 12.19 | 14.93 | 8.32 | 2.53 | 1.58 | 4.75 | 15.17 | 0.39 | 0.00 | 0.23 | 0.64 | 101724 |
| 1990 | 55.37 | 5.74 | 8.00 | 7.39 | 2.60 | 0.45 | 4.40 | 13.47 | 1.33 | 0.00 | 0.75 | 0.50 | 103814 |
| 1991 | 51.36 | 19.40 | 5.83 | 2.56 | 0.00 | 0.76 | 2.36 | 15.67 | 1.11 | 0.00 | 0.44 | 0.40 | 147131 |
| 1992 | 49.51 | 18.27 | 6.90 | 1.73 | 0.00 | 0.86 | 3.09 | 13.73 | 5.60 | 0.00 | 0.17 | 0.16 | 188124 |
| 1993 | 43.51 | 10.80 | 6.47 | 1.00 | 0.00 | 0.74 | 2.21 | 6.49 | 27.79 | 0.00 | 0.71 | 0.30 | 244508 |
| 1994 | 49.05 | 8.00 | 8.08 | 0.33 | 0.00 | 1.00 | 2.27 | 3.47 | 25.67 | 0.84 | 0.21 | 1.08 | 186326 |
| 1995 | 44.79 | 9.33 | 7.83 | 0.04 | 0.00 | 0.59 | 1.60 | 11.17 | 18.76 | 1.77 | 2.01 | 2.12 | 187543 |
| 1996 | 34.35 | 9.94 | 11.25 | 0.05 | 0.00 | 0.93 | 1.78 | 4.11 | 31.47 | 1.30 | 2.51 | 2.32 | 211714 |
| 1997 | 46.10 | 9.14 | 23.68 | 0.81 | 0.00 | 0.84 | 2.17 | 2.59 | 1.23 | 0.38 | 11.86 | 1.20 | 231077 |
| 1998 | 59.30 | 9.51 | 14.49 | 2.54 | 0.00 | 0.47 | 2.62 | 1.79 | 0.21 | 0.22 | 8.12 | 0.75 | 267667 |
| 1999 | 69.26 | 8.35 | 12.06 | 2.09 | 0.00 | 0.65 | 1.73 | 1.51 | 0.00 | 0.56 | 3.58 | 0.21 | 268182 |
| 2000 | 64.94 | 0.27 | 15.28 | 0.64 | 0.00 | 0.45 | 2.08 | 2.36 | 7.74 | 0.44 | 4.98 | 0.80 | 222686 |
| 2001 | 72.63 | 2.83 | 8.60 | 0.12 | 0.00 | 0.24 | 2.31 | 2.41 | 2.60 | 0.83 | 5.09 | 2.34 | 188965 |
| 2002 | 72.47 | 7.00 | 11.29 | 0.25 | 0.00 | 0.70 | 2.38 | 1.74 | 0.04 | 0.01 | 3.05 | 1.06 | 225256 |
| 2003 Jan-Sept | 66.85 | 7.88 | 15.55 | 0.04 | 0.00 | 1.28 | 2.76 | 1.60 | 0.00 | 0.09 | 2.19 | 1.75 | 185523 |
| Total | 51.78 | 9.46 | 12.16 | 2.58 | 1.85 | 1.44 | 2.64 | 6.42 | 7.19 | 0.37 | 2.99 | 1.10 | 3582402 |

Source: Prepared from BMET data 2003

Table 2: Percentage distribution of Bangladeshi migrant workers by level of skills (1976- Sept 2003)

| Year | Professional | Skilled | Semi-skilled | Unskilled | Total |
|-----------------|--------------|---------|--------------|-----------|---------|
| 1976 | 9.33 | 29.16 | 8.92 | 52.59 | 6087 |
| 1977 | 11.23 | 41.00 | 3.12 | 44.66 | 15725 |
| 1978 | 15.15 | 35.91 | 4.60 | 44.34 | 22809 |
| 1979 | 14.26 | 28.60 | 6.88 | 50.26 | 24495 |
| 1980 | 6.59 | 40.60 | 7.79 | 45.02 | 30073 |
| 1981 | 6.98 | 40.21 | 4.39 | 48.42 | 55787 |
| 1982 | 6.21 | 32.84 | 5.21 | 55.74 | 62762 |
| 1983 | 3.08 | 31.98 | 8.61 | 56.33 | 59220 |
| 1984 | 4.66 | 30.30 | 9.67 | 55.37 | 56714 |
| 1985 | 3.31 | 36.33 | 10.07 | 50.30 | 77694 |
| 1986 | 3.22 | 38.30 | 13.49 | 44.99 | 68658 |
| 1987 | 3.00 | 32.21 | 13.00 | 51.79 | 74017 |
| 1988 | 3.92 | 37.12 | 15.99 | 43.09 | 68121 |
| 1989 | 5.23 | 38.16 | 17.36 | 39.24 | 101724 |
| 1990 | 5.78 | 34.30 | 20.03 | 39.88 | 103814 |
| 1991 | 6.13 | 31.87 | 22.16 | 39.84 | 147131 |
| 1992 | 6.05 | 26.94 | 16.47 | 50.54 | 188124 |
| 1993 | 4.54 | 29.31 | 27.06 | 39.09 | 244508 |
| 1994 | 4.50 | 32.76 | 24.97 | 37.77 | 186326 |
| 1995 | 3.39 | 31.94 | 17.09 | 47.58 | 187543 |
| 1996 | 1.51 | 30.37 | 16.38 | 51.74 | 211714 |
| 1997 | 1.64 | 28.22 | 18.85 | 51.29 | 231077 |
| 1998 | 3.58 | 27.91 | 19.27 | 49.23 | 267667 |
| 1999 | 3.00 | 36.71 | 16.76 | 43.53 | 268182 |
| 2000 | 4.79 | 44.73 | 11.88 | 38.60 | 222686 |
| 2001 | 3.14 | 22.62 | 16.25 | 57.99 | 188965 |
| 2002 | 6.41 | 24.98 | 15.99 | 52.61 | 225256 |
| 2003 (Jan-Sept) | 6.09 | 29.53 | 11.93 | 52.45 | 185523 |
| Total | 4.40 | 31.80 | 16.66 | 47.14 | 3582402 |

Note: 150,000 Bangladeshi workers legalized in Malaysia during 1997

Source: Prepared from BMET data 2003.

Table 3: Percentage distribution of Bangladeshi migrant workers by sending agency (1976-Sept 2003)

| Year | BMET | BOESL | Recruiting Agent | Individual | Total |
|---------------|-------------|--------------|-------------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| 1976 | 86.73 | 0.00 | 4.67 | 8.61 | 6087 |
| 1977 | 36.43 | 0.00 | 7.45 | 56.12 | 15725 |
| 1978 | 27.01 | 0.00 | 8.74 | 64.25 | 22809 |
| 1979 | 28.40 | 0.00 | 12.11 | 59.49 | 24495 |
| 1980 | 19.00 | 0.00 | 25.85 | 55.15 | 30073 |
| 1981 | 10.89 | 0.00 | 39.83 | 49.29 | 55787 |
| 1982 | 7.14 | 0.00 | 39.74 | 53.12 | 62762 |
| 1983 | 1.23 | 0.00 | 44.44 | 54.32 | 59220 |
| 1984 | 0.00 | 0.28 | 57.23 | 42.49 | 56714 |
| 1985 | 0.00 | 1.57 | 50.71 | 47.72 | 77694 |
| 1986 | 0.00 | 2.76 | 40.58 | 56.66 | 68658 |
| 1987 | 0.00 | 0.46 | 45.69 | 53.85 | 74017 |
| 1988 | 0.00 | 0.70 | 50.08 | 49.22 | 68121 |
| 1989 | 0.00 | 0.70 | 35.89 | 63.42 | 101724 |
| 1990 | 0.00 | 0.42 | 38.78 | 60.80 | 103814 |
| 1991 | 0.00 | 0.10 | 44.10 | 55.80 | 147131 |
| 1992 | 0.02 | 0.29 | 31.76 | 67.93 | 188124 |
| 1993 | 0.21 | 0.23 | 52.95 | 46.61 | 244508 |
| 1994 | 0.13 | 0.10 | 51.18 | 48.60 | 186326 |
| 1995 | 0.04 | 0.34 | 40.60 | 60.65 | 187543 |
| 1996 | 0.00 | 0.19 | 56.05 | 43.76 | 211714 |
| 1997 | 0.01 | 0.14 | 37.13 | 62.72 | 231077 |
| 1998 | 0.00 | 0.16 | 31.87 | 67.98 | 267667 |
| 1999 | 0.00 | 0.12 | 41.27 | 58.62 | 268182 |
| 2000 | 0.00 | 0.24 | 41.08 | 58.69 | 222686 |
| 2001 | 0.00 | 0.08 | 40.57 | 59.35 | 188965 |
| 2002 | 0.00 | 0.10 | 37.47 | 62.43 | 225256 |
| 2003 Jan-Sept | 0.00 | 0.22 | 33.93 | 65.86 | 185523 |
| Total | 1.17 | 0.28 | 41.10 | 57.45 | 3582402 |

Source: Prepared from BMET data 2003.

Table 4: Number and percentage of women migrants in comparison to total flow (1991-2003)

| Year | Women Migrants | | Total Number |
|-----------------|-----------------------|-------------------|------------------------|
| | Number | % of Total | Male and Female |
| 1991-1995 | 9308 | 0.98 | 953632 |
| 1996 | 1567 | 0.74 | 211714 |
| 1997 | 1762 | 0.76 | 231077 |
| 1998 | 939 | 0.35 | 267667 |
| 1999 | 366 | 0.14 | 268182 |
| 2000 | 454 | 0.20 | 222686 |
| 2001 | 659 | 0.35 | 188965 |
| 2002 | 1217 | 0.54 | 225256 |
| 2003 (Jan-Sept) | 1240 | 0.67 | 185523 |
| Total | 17512 | 0.64 | 2754693 |

Source: Prepared from manually consolidated figures provided by BMET, 2003.

Table 5: Percentage increase/decrease in number of migrant workers and remittances over the previous year (1976-2002)

| Year | Number of migrants | Increase/decrease % | Remittance (us \$ million) | Increase/decrease % |
|--------------|--------------------|---------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|
| 1976 | 6,087 | | 23.71 | |
| 1977 | 15,725 | 158.33 | 82.79 | 249.18 |
| 1978 | 22,809 | 45.04 | 106.90 | 29.12 |
| 1979 | 24,495 | 7.39 | 172.06 | 60.95 |
| 1980 | 30,073 | 22.77 | 301.33 | 75.13 |
| 1981 | 55,787 | 85.51 | 304.88 | 1.18 |
| 1982 | 62,762 | 12.50 | 490.77 | 60.97 |
| 1983 | 59,220 | 5.64 | 627.51 | 27.86 |
| 1984 | 56,714 | -4.23 | 500.00 | 20.32 |
| 1985 | 77,694 | 36.99 | 500.00 | 0.00 |
| 1986 | 68,658 | -11.63 | 576.20 | 15.24 |
| 1987 | 74,017 | 7.80 | 747.60 | 29.74 |
| 1988 | 68,121 | -7.97 | 763.90 | 2.18 |
| 1989 | 101,724 | 49.33 | 757.84 | -0.79 |
| 1990 | 103,814 | 2.05 | 781.54 | 3.12 |
| 1991 | 147,131 | 41.72 | 769.30 | -1.56 |
| 1992 | 188,124 | 27.86 | 901.97 | 17.24 |
| 1993 | 244,508 | 29.97 | 1,009.09 | 11.87 |
| 1994 | 186,326 | -23.79 | 1,153.54 | 14.31 |
| 1995 | 187,543 | 0.65 | 1,201.52 | 4.16 |
| 1996 | 211,714 | 12.89 | 1,355.34 | 12.79 |
| 1997 | 231,077 | 9.14 | 1,525.03 | 12.52 |
| 1998 | 267,667 | 29.76 | 1,599.24 | 4.86 |
| 1999 | 268,182 | 0.19 | 1,806.63 | 12.96 |
| 2000 | 222,686 | -16.96 | 1,954.95 | 8.21 |
| 2001 | 188,965 | -15.14 | 2,071.03 | 5.94 |
| 2002 | 225,256 | 19.20 | 2,847.79 | 37.50 |
| Total | 2,909,972 | | 18058.74 | |

Source: Prepared from BMET data, 2003

Table 6: Utilization of remittance by 100 households

| Use | In taka | % |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------|---------------|
| Food and clothing | 4,466,280 | 2.45 |
| Medical treatment | 703,800 | 3.22 |
| Child education | 600,940 | 2.75 |
| Agricultural land purchase | 2,455,400 | 11.24 |
| Homestead land purchase | 210,000 | 0.96 |
| Home construction/repair | 3,280,000 | 15.02 |
| Release of mortgaged land | 490,000 | 2.24 |
| Taking mortgage on land | 435,000 | 1.99 |
| Repayment of loan (for migration) | 2,304,600 | 10.55 |
| Repayment of loan (other purpose) | 757,500 | 3.47 |
| Investment in business | 1,039,200 | 4.76 |
| Savings/fixed deposit | 670,000 | 3.07 |
| Insurance | 72,140 | 0.33 |
| Social ceremonies | 1,980,000 | 9.07 |
| Gift/donation to relatives | 205,000 | 0.94 |
| Send relative for pilgrimage | 200,000 | 0.92 |
| Community development activities | 20,520 | 0.09 |
| Sending family member abroad | 1,571,000 | 7.19 |
| Furniture | 151,300 | 0.69 |
| Others | 227,000 | 1.04 |
| Total | 21,839,680 | 100.00 |

Source: Siddiqui and Abrar, 2001.

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