LABOUR MIGRATION FROM BANGLADESH 2013

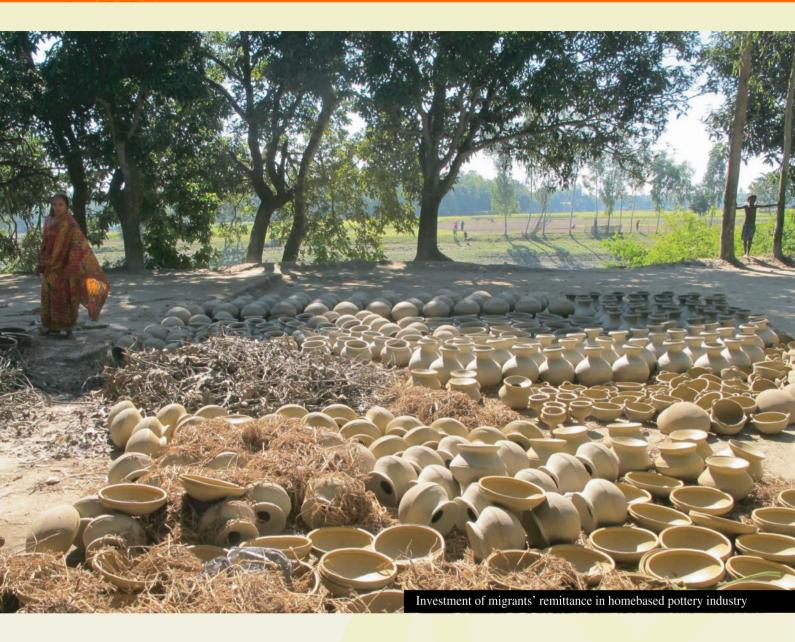
ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES





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International Labour Migration from Bangladesh 2013 Achievements and Challenges

Labour migration is one of three important sectors that made major contribution towards achieving the dream of Bangladesh to transform itself into a middle-income country; readymade garments and the services are the other two. Male and female migrant workers not only contribute to the economy of Bangladesh by sending emittances; they also bring back new knowledge, skills and technology. Recent studies have shown that left behind members of migrant families and the return migrants contribute more compared to non-migrant families in modernizing agriculture by using mechanized equipments, high quality seeds, insecticide and ensuring adequate rigation. Migrant families are contributing to rejuvenation of rural economies through production of cash crop, fishery, poultry etc. Through their improved purchasing power they directly influence the rural market places. Besides, over last nine years Bangladesh could maintain the status of a country with surplus balance of payment due to constant flow of remittances. Since 2000, in the face of demands from civil society organizations, successive governments of Bangladesh have taken measures to better govern the sector. Reform of 2006 Overseas Employment Policy, enactment of Overseas Employment and Migrant Workers Law, 2013 and establishment of decentralized system of online registration of workers are some of the important achievements of the government in 2013. This report makes an assessment of the achievements and concerns of government, the private sector and civil society in migration sector in 2013.

1. Labour Migration from Bangladesh 2013

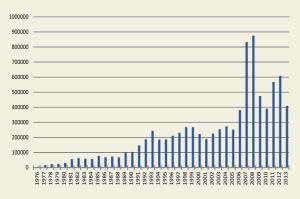
1.1 Statistics

Bangladesh has experienced the highest flow of migration in 2008. That year more than eight hundred thousand workers went abroad on short-term contract. In 2009 and 2010 this figure slowed down to almost half due to global financial crisis. Again in the next two years (2011 and 2012) migration flow from Bangladesh increased marginally compared to previous two years. In 2012, a total of 607,798 workers went abroad for employment. In 2013 up to 31 December only 409,253 workers have gone abroad. Compared to last year it was 32.67% less, and the flow was nearly one-third compared to 2008. Therefore, 2013 was a bad year for migration flow from Bangladesh. According to BMET, a total of 8.679 million people had migrated abroad for work. However, as there is no system of keeping data on returnee migrants, it is impossible to ascertain the total number of migrants currently working abroad. There is no reason to think that 8.679 million workers who went abroad with BMET clearance are still working abroad. The following graph demonstrates yearwise migration trend from Bangladesh.

Female migration from Bangladesh is a relatively recent phenemenon. A cursory look at the BMET data from 1997 to 2005 shows that female migrants compised only 1% of total migrants in those years. Female migration is witnessing upward trend since the lifting of the ban on unskilled and semi-skilled female workers in 2006.



In 2012, 37,304 female workers have gone overseas with jobs. This year a total 56,400 female workers have gone abroad for work. Female migration witnessed 51.19% growth during 2013. This year female migrants constituted 13.78% of the total number of outbound migrants. This figure was double that of 2012(6.14%).



Graph: Labour migration from Bangladesh from 1976 to 2013

1.2 Destination countries

Most of the Bangladeshi short-term contract workers migrate to Middle Eastern countries. At the same time, a good number of Bangladeshi workers also migrate to Southeast Asian countries. From 1976 to 2012, the share of migrants in Middle East rose from 58.10% to 97.30%. Six countries of the Middle East-Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and Bahrain are major destinations of Bangladeshi labour migrants. In September 2012, UAE government had imposed restriction on migration of Bangladeshis and hence migration flow to that country had drastically dropped. Up to 31 December 2013, only 14,241 workers had migrated to this country which was 93.39% less than to last year.

Bangladesh has shown no success in reentering its traditional largest market-Saudi Arabia. Only 12,654 workers had migrated to Saudi Arabia this year which was 40.40% less compared to last year. Of total migrants this year only 3.48% had migrated to UAE and 3.09% to Saudi Arabia which was 35.45% and 3.49% respectively in last year. This year the highest number of workers had migrated to Oman. Up to 31 December 2013 as high as 134,028 workers had migrated to this country which was 32.75% of total migrants who had gone abroad.

Singapore was the second highest migrant receiving country for Bangladesh in 2013. This year a total of 60,057 workers migrated to this country which was 14.76% of total number of workers who went abroad. Qatar was in the third position by receiving 57,584 workers. This year 14.07% of total workers migrated to this country. Qatar has started recruiting workers in its construction sector. Only 1,000 workers had migrated to Malaysia under G2G system this year.

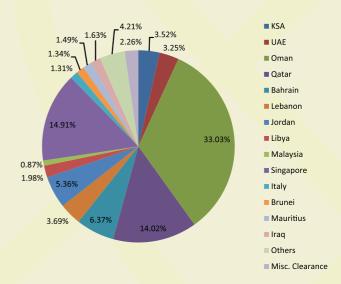


Chart: Destination countries of Bangladeshi migrant workers in 2013



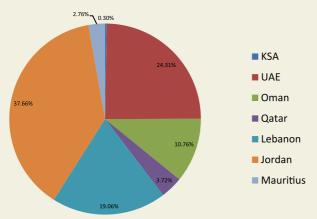


Chart: Destination countries of Bangladeshi female migrant workers in 2013

Similar to last year this year also Middle East was the largest market for Bangladeshi female migrant workers. In 2013, Jordan (37.66%) was the largest female migrant receiving country of Bangladesh, followed by UAE (24.31%), Lebanon (19.06%), Oman (10.76%) and Mauritius (2.76%). Moreover, a good number of female workers had migrated to Hong Kong and most of them are involved in domestic work.

A close scrutiny of the destination countries of 2013 shows that a section of migrants have gone to countries such as Lebanon, Libya, Egypt, Iraq and Sudan. These countries are not politically stable. Concerns remained high about the personal security and safety of workers in these politically unstable countries. Working conditions of male and female migrants in destination countries are major areas of concern for RMMRU and other national and international human rights organizations. Of course, working conditions of some of the companies in the receiving countries are quite good, yet low wage, non-payment of wage, contract substitution, unregulated working hours, risky work environment, unhygienic living condition, insecured movement particularly of women garments workers and absence of collective







bargaining system characterize majority of the employers in the Middle East and a section of the Southeast Asian countries. Bangladesh like most other origin countries did not deal with these issues effectively in 2013 out of fear of losing market. In recent times, different regional migrant and human rights forums have taken up these issues seriously. The concerned government bodies of different ministries of Bangladesh still work under the bureaucratic compulsion of avoiding these organizations rather than providing them with information on violation of rights of migrants.

1.3 Skills

This year another major issue of concern in the context of migration is reduction of flow of skilled workers. In 2011 and 2012 the share of skilled workers dropped to 40.34% and 34.45% respectively. This year it slided further to 19.67% of total workers. Almost all the labour sending countries that took part in short term contract labour market made conscious decision to reduce migration of unskilled workers and gradually entered skilled labour

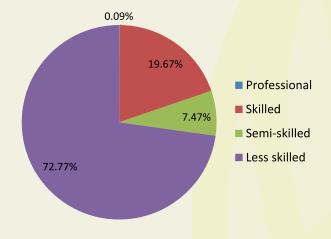
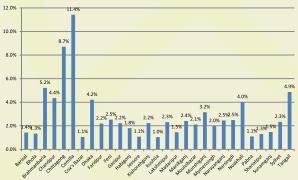


Chart: skill composition of Bangladeshi migrant workers in 2013

market. The experience of Sri Lanka and the Philippines is noteworthy in this context. Bangladesh is not experiencing any such change. Although the Overseas Employment Policy of Bangladesh targets promotion of skilled migration as one of its major objectives, one witnesses hardly any action plan to achieve that.

1.4 Source areas

Comilla (11.37%) lists the top of migrant source districts in Bangladesh. Chittagong (8.69%), Bhahmanbaria (5.24%), Tangail (4.88%), Chandpur (4.35%), Dhaka (4.23%), Noakhali (3.92%), Munshigonj (3.11%), Feni (2.49%) and Narsingdi (2.46%) were the other nine major source areas of Bangladeshi migrant workers. Like previous years this year also very insignificant number of workers migrated from northern part of the country. Although there was a plan to increase migration from northern part of Bangladesh, it is yet to have any real effect. In 2013, the rate of migration from Naogaon was 2,798 (0.71%), from Natore 1,983 (0.50%), from Kurigram 1,098 (0.28%), from Gaibandha 1,496 (0.38%), from Rangpur 1,213 (0.31%), and



Graph: Source areas of Bangladeshi migrant workers in 2013



from Nilphamari 873 (0.22%). The graph below reveals very negligible number of people had migrated from poverty-affacted Rajshahi and Rangpur divison. A recent report of the Planning Commission of Government of Bangladesh shows that the number of poor people had decreased in those areas from where the number of migrants had increased. A thorough investigation is needed for why no special action is being taken to promote migration from poverty-affected areas.

1.5 Returnee migrants

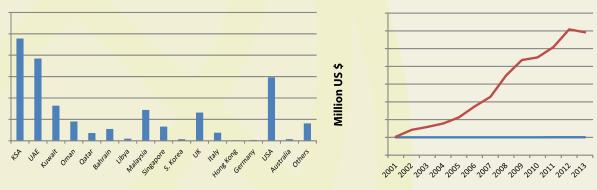
In the absence of sytematic data it is not possible to figure out the total number of migrant workers who had returned home before completion of their work contracts. Up to August 2013, 19,749 workers were deported to Bangladesh with outpass. Lack of information hinders public or private sector organizations to contribute to the social and economic rehabilitation of returnee migrant workers. In the absence of a job portal of returnees the skills of returnee migrants cannot be systematically harnessed.

1.6 Remittance

After three decades of consistent growth of remittance, this year for the first time Bangladesh experienced negative growth. This year Bangladesh received US\$13.83 billion as remittance. It is 2.30% less than last year's flow. Negative growth in remittance is the outcome of downward flow of labour since 2010. Similar to last year, this year as well Saudi Arabia was the largest remittance source country of Bangladesh (23.91%). It was followed by UAE (19.22%), USA (14.83%), Kuwait (8.21%), Malaysia (7.22%) and UK (6.59%). Compared to previous years rate of remittance flow through formal channel from Malaysia has increased.

1.7 Complaints

To provide assistance to deceived migrants, BMET receives complaints in two ways: through online (www.ovijogbmet.org) and in-person complaints at BMET premise. BMET launched online complaints system in September 2009 with technical assistance from RMMRU. From its inception up to 24 November 2013, total 520 online complaints have been lodged. 309 of them have already been settled, hearing has



Graph: Remittance flow in 2013



been completed in 206 cases, and 5 complaints are under investigation. In 2013 (up to 24 November), a total 20 complaints were lodged of which 7 have been settled, hearing has been completed in 8 cases and 5 are under investigation. 4 complaints of these 7 have received a total of Tk.115,000/- as compensation. In another 3 cases, decisions are pending as the persons against whom complaints have been lodged were absent. It is evident from these numbers that very few of the aggrieved parties actually lodge complaints.

2 Important Events in Migration Sector 2013

2.1 Sending workers to Malaysia under G2G system

On 26 November 2012 a memorandum of understanding was signed between the governments of Bangladesh and Malaysia to send and receive workers. In order to reduce the high cost of migration and also on insistance of the Malysian government, the Ministry of EWOE signed such G2G accord. A large section of the civil society welcomed G2G as a positive step. With prior experience of memorandum with Malaysia in 2007, it was expected that 200,000 to 500,000 people would migrate to Malaysia over the next few years. However, due to structural and other complexities of G2G system, Bangladesh could only send 1,000 workers in last year. After a detailed discussions with Malaysian employers, outsourcing companies, officials of Bangladesh mission, NGOs and others RMMRU reached a decision that in order to make G2G effective initially, Bangladesh government could have employed some Malaysian young marketing professionals who could maintain regular communications and encourage Malaysian employers for employing Bangladeshi workers through online process.

Moreover, intesive supervision was needed to comply with photo pixel specification, finger printing etc. Discussions with Malaysian employers reveal that they wanted workers who has necessary field experience. Plantation requires very had work and hence they are unwilling to employ educated workers who do not have prior experience of physical work. In today's competitive world, Bangladesh cannot afford the long time that is required to make G2G successful. Bangladesh has been able to send only a few workers under G2G whereas labour need of Malaysia is being fulfilled through workers of Myanmar and Nepal. Under these circumstances, if Bangladesh wants to retain labour market in Malaysia, it should re-evaluate G2G policy and bring in necessary changes.

2.2 Irregular migration

Irregular migration from Bangladesh continued to be a major concern. Migration from Teknaf to Malaysia through sea, migration attempts to Europe through Iran, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia have hit news headlines many a time in 2013. Migrants are taking high risk when they take part in irregular migration. Cheating, fraud, extortion and death are the outcomes that were reported. A large number of Bangladeshi workers were deported from Saudi Arabia and Malaysia this year. Many others are in jail and in detention camps of receiving countries. The government actions were found to be wanting against illegal human smugglers despite the fact that media has made extensive reports on the criminal syndicates that are engaged in human smuggling from Cox's Bazar - Teknaf region.

2.3 High cost of migration

RMMRU has completed fieldwork of a research study in six districts titled "Impact of Migration on Poverty" during September to November 2013.



It is a collaborative research of RMMRU and the University of Sussex, UK. Findings of this research reveal that those who had migrated this year to Saudi Arabia had spent Tk.1,000,000 to Tk.1,200,000. Similarly those who had migrated to Qatar had spent Tk. 700,000 to 800,000. Although only 1,000 workers had gone to Malaysia under G2G, everyday a large number of people are going to that country with student and tourist visas. They are spending around Tk. 300,000 to 400,000 as migration cost. There is hardly any visible impact of the government's migration cost reduction programme.

2.4 Unnatural Death of Migrant Workers

Unnatural or premature death of migrant workers is an important social cost of migration borne by the migrant, his/her family, the community and the nation. Migrants are able bodied persons who go through all kinds of health tests before they are accepted in those countries.

In the last six years 13,827 bodies of deceased migrants were sent to Bangladesh, which is on average around 2,300 per year. 84.28% came from labour receiving countries. Saudi Arabia was the largest source country with 30.44% of the total dead bodies sent, followed by Malaysia (16.83%) and UAE (14.46%). A Prothom Alo report informed, 38 years as the average age of the deceased.

auses of Death	2012(%)	2013(%
Stroke	31.22	29.46
Heart related	14.37	18.49
Accident in workplace and road	32.16	24.63
Sickness	10.78	11.72
Cancer	2.40	2.44
Burn	0.34	1.02
Suicide	0.38	0.75
Murder	0.56	0.35
Not written	4.11	0.79
Missing data	3.68	10.35
Total bodies	2338	2542

The table shows that as many as 32.16% in 2012, and 24.63% in 2013, of the deaths were due to accidents in workplaces and roads.

An awareness









campaign on traffic rules of receiving countries may reduce the accident related death toll manifold. Through research needs to be conducted to identify the causes of such deaths. The government and the civil society should try to place this issue before the UN High Level Dialogue on migration or during the discussions of Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD). Business ethics demands that print and electronic media initiate social dialogue and invest real air time for providing basic safety information to the migrants.

2.5 Online Registration

In January 2013, through newspaper advertisements the government generated an online jobseekers database from all over the country to send workers to work in plantation sector of Malaysia. As many as 1,400,000 people registered online. As stated earlier only 1,000 workers have been recruited from this database. On 22 September 2013, government again put newspaper advertisements for online registration of workers. Only from Dhaka and Barisal division as many as 204,000 people have registered. It is hard to understand why government has asked for registration of workers without any demand letter from anywhere.

3 Legal and Institutional Changes

3.1 Overseas Employment and Migrants Welfare Act 2013

In 2013, the most important achievement of the government was the enactment of the Overseas Employment and Migrant Workers Law 2013. Formulation of this law was longdrawn and it involved all relevant stakeholders. It was enacted in the National Parliament on 23 October. This law has 9 chapters and 49 sections. For the

first time this law has endorsed migrants and their families to lodge criminal case against any deception and civil case for seeking compensation. This is a big step forward for migrant workers. However, despite the demands of civil society, the government did not pay heed to include ILO Convention 97 (revised 1949), Recommendation no.86 (revised 1949), Migrant Workers Convention 143 and Equality of Opportunity and Treatment towards Migrant Workers Convention 1975 in its preamble. Of course it mentioned UN Convention on Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families, 1990. In order to establish rights of migrant workers, rights incorporated in these conventions should have been included in the Overseas Employment and Migrant Workers Act 2013.

4 Service Providing organizatons

4.1 Wage Earners' Welfare Fund

Wage Earners' Welfare Fund is constituted by welfare fees collected from outgoing migrant workers, 10% service charge on consular fees collected in missions and attestation fees paid by employers to embassies for job related documents etc. Initially Tk.100 was collected from outgoing migrant workers as welfare fee. Gradually, over the years, it was increased to Tk.1,000 to Tk.1,300. In 2013, without assigning any reason this fee was doubled and a migrant now has to pay Tk.2,000 for non-attested visa and Tk.2,500 for embassy-attested visa. Unfortunately this fund principally made-up of migrant workers' fees is hardly used for direct welfare of workers. A simple calculation would be helpful in this regard. If one assumes on average each migrant worker paid Tk.1,150 during 2005 to 2013, one can see that excluding attestation and consular fees BMET had collected around Tk. 550 crore solely from



the welfare fees charged to the migrant workers. During 2005 to 2013, Tk.37 crore 12 lac 62 thousand has been distributed to meet burial cost of deceased migrants and Tk. 49 crore 31 lac 11 thousand 814 has been handed over to the relatives of deceased migrants as compensation. Only these can be considered as direct service to the migrants. Except this, this fund has been mainly used for such activities resource for which should have been generated from revenue budget of the government. Establishment of Migrants Welfare Bank, renovation of offices of the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, construction of training infrastructure of BMET, appointment of Labour Attaches and Welfare Officers, and the expenses of various high profile international tours of government officials in the name of exploring new labour market are being met from this fund. Such utilization of Wage Earners' Welfare Fund is unethical and we demand for utilizing this fund to ensure direct services to migrant workers by changing its rules of business.

4.2 Recruiting agency

For a long time civil society and the media have been highlighting the issue of lack of accountability of recruiting agencies in case of processing labour recruitment. The civil society organizations continuously reiterated concerns regarding high cost of migration, contract substitution, providing certain type of work instead of the one promised and non-payment of wage and cheating. A section of informal intermediaries, travel agents as well as licensed recruiting agencies are responsible for these misdeeds. Government has given importance to these concerns in last couple of years. In order to make them accountable it has framed new law and promoted G2G with all potential receiving countries of Bangladeshi migrants.





As per BMET information, currently there are 852 licensed recuiting agencies. In 2012, 52 recruiting agents received new license and in 2013, 7 others received such license. It is difficult to understand why government is still issuing new licenses when it has decided to reduce the scope of work of recruiting agencies. If we analyse recruitment related activities in 2013, we can see that the government had attempted to send workers to several countries through G2G, but it had very limited success in accessing new labour market. This resulted in, on one hand, decreased migration flow and, on the other, the cost of migration continuously increased. Under the circumstances, RMMRU thinks that the government should revert back to its regulatory role and cooperate with the recruiting agencies to facilitate recruitment functions of the agencies while ensuring accountability.

4.3 Migrants' Welfare Bank

The Migrants' Welfare Bank was established in 2011 with total capital of Tk. 1,000,000,000. Of the total amount 95 percent was mobilised from the Wage Earners' Welfare Fund and the government itself put in the rest 5 percent. Although initially there was a plan to make it a modern technology-based bank, irregularity was experienced in recruitment of its officials. Before framing the rules staff were recruited for as many as 22 branches. In 2013, only 1,567 workers of 400,000 who had gone abroad could avail loan from the Probashi Kallyan Bank. Till now the bank could not initiate any creative scheme that would encourage returnee migrant workers to develop enterprise. This year only 60 returnee migrants received Tk.1.70 crore as reintegration loan.

4.4 Government activites at grassroots level: DEMO

In order to provide services to migrant workers at the grassroots, 42 DEMO offices are operational under BMET. Evaluation of institutional structure of these offices reveals that 20 of these 42 offices are run without the top functionary. Almost half of the posts in these offices are vacant. Moreover, the staff members do not receive any specialised training to serve the workers. These institutionally weak offices are failing to provide services to migrant workers. Instead of fixing the problem BMET justifies not to decentralize its functions on the ground that DEMOs are not capable to perform such functions.

4.5 Human Resource Development and TTCs of BMET

There are 38 Technical Training Centres (TTCs) under the BMET and 10 more are being constructed. Last year about 65,000 participants received training in different skills. This year (up to November) 75,000 have received such training. The crisis of lack of human resource is also visible in these TTCs. In 2013, no new trainer has been recruited. On the other hand, a notable number of trainers had retired. In the absence of Principal and Vice-Principals it is the instructors who are running the TTCs. These training centres have the capacity of training 20,000 workers per year. The actual number of workers who receive training from here is three times more than its capacity. In 2013, no new trade or curriculum has been introduced. This year no Training of the Trainers (TOT) has been provided to train even in old trades. Including Principals total 100 trainers had received administrative training under the STEP project of World Bank.



4.6 Labour Attaches

Many problems exist that hinder attaining minimum basic services from the embassies in the countries of destination. RMMRU's recent research reveals that 80% of total complaints placed by the migrants in 2013 are about timeframe required for renewal of passport, issuance of MRP passport, migrant unfriendly locations of embassies, lack of availability of drinking water in embassy premise, lack of sufficient waiting areas, toilet facilities in the embassies and inconvenient and avoidable repeat visits. In general, labour attaches are blamed for such impersonal services of the embassies. However, all the above services are rendered by Ministry of Home Affairs. Institutional interest of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Home Affairs and Labour Attaches does not allow coordination and partnership among foreign and home ministry officials and labour attaches in the area of Machine Readable Passport (MRP) and other above issues. This ultimately results in migrants not receiving basic services from the embassy in an efficient manner. The labour attaches can only work in the areas of workers' dispute, death, repatriation, identification of Bangladeshi citizens in jail etc. It was observed that in many instances the Ministry of Home Affairs does not engage the labour attaches in MRP passport related functions. Whereas issuance of MRP passports takes long time due to lack of manpower. If all Bangladeshi migrant workers are not issued MRP passports by 31 March 2015, about 4,500,000 workers would face severe problems in retaining their job and also in traveling.



A successful migrant who came on holiday with his mother



4.7 Role of Civil Society in Migration Sector

Civil society has been playing an important role in migration sector for a long time. In 2013, WARBE DF, OKUP, BRAC and RMMRU had collectively trained 10,000 aspirant migrant workers. Besides, these organizations have made 638,486 people aware of migration though conduction of 673 public awareness programmes at village level. Through local level arbitration these organizations have successfully recovered Tk. 5,900,000 by resolving 129 cases. Last year RMMRU, WARBE DF, ACD and Ain O Salish Kendra organized a consultation meeting in Dhaka on the eve of 2nd UN High Level Dialogue. This year on 20th April, a follow-up discussion was organized and various issue-based recommendations of this discussion were presented at the UN High Level Dialogue in New York.

RMMRU prepared the draft version of the Overseas Employment and Migrant Workers Act 2013. The inclusion of 1990 UN Convention in the preamble of the law, application of principle of equality, right of migrants to directly pursue criminal and civil case at any court are the major issues incorporated from RMMRU draft into the law.

Conclusion

It is not very difficult to locate the causes that are affecting migration and remittance flow from Bangladesh negatively this year. One of the obvious reasons is the lack of incorporation of migration in a significant way in the ten-year perspective plan of Bangladesh and the failure of the 6th five-year plan to identify migration as one of the thrust sectors of Bangladesh and allocate resources accordingly. Lack of partnership among

Foreign Ministry and MEWOE is an important hindrance in exploring labour market, consolidating services to labour migrants in the destination countries and fruitful participation in different global migration forums. Migration governance is a complex phenomenon. It is of great importance to retain functionaries who have attained great knowledge in governing migration over a long period of time. The MEWOE has shown little success in retaining capable government functionaries in its line agency BMET.

The obvious tension between the association of recruiting agencies and the ministry of EWOE has thrown the greatest challenge to migration governance in Bangladesh. It is imperative that the government ensures accountability of recruiting agencies in processing recruitment. The majority of stakeholders supported government initiatives of G2G with the aim of reducing cost of migration. Nonetheless, G2G experience of Malaysia has demonstrated that government mechanisms have limitations in pursuing job contracts with employers. It is time for the government to rethink and bring in necessary changes in its policy.

In a broader context, for steady development in every economic and social sphere, a country requires political stability. It is the bad luck of the migrants and the nation as a whole that the government and parties in opposition create a new constitutional crisis during each regime that takes back the achievements of common people. The migration sector is no exception. While thinking of efficient governance of migration sector in 2014, one has to demand accountability of government and opposition political parties and immediate resolution of unnecessary political crisis.



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Foot Note

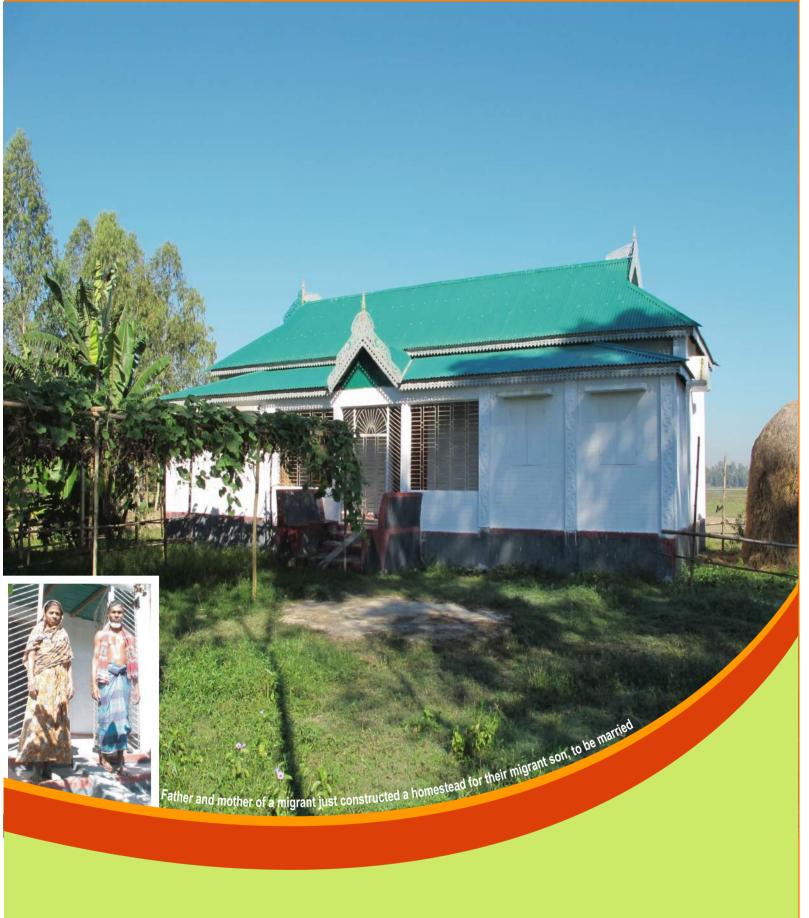
⁴Concerns expressed in the Labour Attaché Conference 2013 (The Dhaka Tribune; 1 September, 2013)



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Research and Communications Officer, RMMRU, University of Dhaka

³The Financial Express, 4 September, 2012



This document is co-authored by Dr. Tasneem Siddiqui, Professor in Political Science and Founding Chair, RMMRU and Md. Selim Reza, Research and Communications Officer, RMMRU, University of Dhaka. Mr. Parvez Alam, IT Officer organized statistical information and Ms. Salbhi Sumaiya of RMMRU did the graphic designing. RMMRU thanks them and deeply acknowledges the contribution of its programme and research divisions. RMMRU further thanks Ms. Marina Sultana, Programme Manager (Field Operations) and Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) for supporting the publication under its "Sustaining Gains from Migration: Asserting Migrant Rights (AMR) project.



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