

Profile of RMMRU

RMMRU is a centre for evidence-based research, policy advocacy, and grassroots action. The Unit began as a migration research organisation in 1995 with the specific aim of generating knowledge for policy reform. Within a few years RMMRU research began contributing to policy change. The organisation soon realised if the fruits of policy changes are to be enjoyed by the target beneficiaries, then they need to access information and the capacity of the service providers need to be enhanced. By 1998, the Unit incorporated capacity building training of different service providers and awareness raising of the migrants as two other areas of its core functions. Over the years, RMMRU has specialised in five areas. These are: (a) evidence-based research; (b) setting policy reform agenda and contribution in policy formulation, (c) institutional capacity building of service providers, (d) national and community based awareness campaign, and (e) networking and referral.

Issue areas: Migration is an extremely complex process. In its 26 years of existence RMMRU's remit expanded and the Unit got engaged in a broad spectrum of issues that intersect with migration. RMMRU began its work on short term labour migration, statelessness and refugee concerns. Gradually it encompassed issues of migration governance, streamlining labour recruitment, remittance management and utilisation, gender responsive migration, diaspora, migrants' access to justice, reintegration of returnee migrants, irregular migration and trafficking, gender based violence of migrants and emergency return. The Unit also got engaged in research and policy framing on climate change and disaster related displacement and internal migration, non-traditional security threat and migration, and migration and violent extremism.

Evidence based research and policy change: As a leading think tank on migration RMMRU has conducted more than 80 original researches. Around 25 of them have been published as books¹. In addition it has 49 working papers², 12 annual migration trends reports³, 19 occasional papers⁴, 29 policy briefs⁵ on migration and another 8 policy briefs on climate change and migration to its credit.

Lifting Ban on Female Migration: The pioneering research of RMMRU on female international labour migration from Bangladesh was not only first of its kind in the country; indeed, it was first in the whole of Asia. Based on this research and policy advocacy, over a period of six years the ban was gradually lifted on female labour migration from Bangladesh. RMMRU is proud for its role in leading the mainstream civil society in demanding the constitutional right of women to enjoy equal right of men to move. Since lifting of the ban in 2003 until February, 2021, 918,580 women could assert their right by taking overseas employment. From less than 0.5% on average during the period of 1991 to 2003,

¹<http://www.rmmru.org/newsite/publications/books/>

²<http://www.rmmru.org/newsite/publications/working-papers/>

³<http://www.rmmru.org/newsite/publications/migration-trends-report/>

⁴<http://www.rmmru.org/newsite/publications/books/>

⁵<http://www.rmmru.org/newsite/impact/policy-advocacy/>

percentage share of female migrant increased to 13%⁶ of the total flow in 2019. This is a major contribution of RMMRU in policy change.

National Strategy for Streamlining Recruitment: RMMRU at the invitation of the then Ministry of Labour in 2001 prepared the national strategy on ‘Streamlining labour recruitment in Bangladesh’. Based on this document, a separate ministry for managing short term labour migrants and diaspora was created in December 2001.⁷

Overseas Employment Policy 2006 and Overseas Employment and Migration Act 2013: An important feather in RMMRU’s cap is its role in the preparation of the draft Overseas Employment Policy, 2006. Bangladesh was first in South Asia to develop a policy on labour migration. It also prepared the first draft of the Overseas Employment and Migration Act 2013 involving the Law Commission, the ministry and BMET functionaries, lawyers and migration experts spending one and a half years. Later International Labour Organization (ILO) provided technical assistance on the draft prepared by RMMRU that was subsequently enacted by the parliament in 2013. RMMRU articulated the migrant’s voice in the drafting of the 6th and 7th Five Year Plans by preparing background papers for the Ministry of Expatriates’ Welfare and Overseas Employment and IOM⁸.

Bank Led Mobile Solution of Remittance Transfer: In 2009 its long drawn campaign focusing mobile solution in remittance transfer was materialised. Through its membership in Bangladesh Bank Challenge Fund Committee, RMMRU successfully convinced its members to allow NGOs to be the last leg of remittance transfer.

Annulment of Pay Cash Exclusivity Clause: RMMRU along with all the public and private banks launched a campaign for withdrawal of the ‘Pay Cash Exclusivity’ clause from remittance transfer agreements with Western Union. RMMRU organised a consultation of senior bankers and invited by Governor of Bangladesh Bank. The Governor was convinced and on 13 December 2010, the Bangladesh Bank issued a circular to terminate the exclusivity clause from the banks’ current arrangements of money transfer and not to add such clause in any future arrangement. Annulment of the clause has increased the flow of remittance manifold as it allowed all banks tied to Western Union to go into corresponding relationship with as many exchange houses as they wanted.

Ratification of 1990 UN Convention: RMMRU and WARBE, DF have been campaigning for ratification of 1990 Convention on Protection of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families for a long time. In December 2010, RMMRU brought Mr. Abdelhamid El Jamri, Chair of the UN Committee on 1990 Migrant Workers Convention to convince the stakeholders for ratification who held a number of meetings with the Minister of Law,

⁶ RMMRU (2020). *Labour Migration from Bangladesh: Achievements and Challenges 2019*. Dhaka:RMMRU.

⁷Beyond the Maze: Streamlining Labour Recruitment Process in Bangladesh, <http://www.rmmru.org/newsite/publications/books/>

⁸ Incorporation of migration in Bangladesh “6th five year plan”, <http://www.rmmru.org/newsite/impact/policy-influences/>; Situation Analysis of Migration Context and Policy Framework in Bangladesh, <https://www.dropbox.com/s/vvexow11oou17if/SITUATION%20ANALYSIS%20OF%20MIGRATION.pdf?dl=0>

Secretaries of the Ministries of MoEWOE and Foreign Affairs and the Chair of the concerned Parliamentary Standing Committee. Bangladesh ratified the Convention on August 24, 2011.

Regularisation of Sub-agents: The RMMRU's campaign⁹ for regularisation of sub-agents is finally seeing the light of day when the Prime Minister on September 4, 2019 advised the Ministry of EWOE to provide identity card to the sub-agents. It also developed a number of strategic documents for BMET, WEWB and BOESL. The Unit has recently prepared a Code of Conduct and developed an arbitration model for BAIRA to ensure access to justice to aggrieved parties.

Social Cost of Migration: Currently RMMRU is engaged in a campaign about recognition of social cost of migration¹⁰ and calls for re-titling the migrant households as 'families left in charge' instead of 'left-behind families'.

Climate Change and Displacement: Since 2008, RMMRU gradually got involved into climate change related migration. It has published important articles in international journals, participated in global research consortiums in conducting large scale surveys to understand the extent of climate related migration in Bangladesh. In 2015 RMMRU was bestowed with the honour of drafting the National Strategy for Management of Climate Change and Disaster Induced Internal Displacement. The Unit innovatively built a coalition of climate change related organisations. In February 2021, it succeeded in convincing the government to adopt the strategy. In April 2021, RMMRU was assigned by the same ministry to prepare the action plan for implementation of the strategy. RMMRU's partnership with renowned climate migration scholar Professor Neil Adger and experimentation with photo elicitation method involving the city planners and the climate induced new migrants of urban locations resulted in incorporating their voice in the upcoming city planning of the port city of Chattogram.

Capacity building: Migration is an extremely complex process. In order to ensure services to the migrants at the grassroots, different types of stakeholders and service providers need to strengthen their capacity. Since 1998, RMMRU has been organising capacity building training for different stakeholders. Important amongst those are, 10-day residential training for young academics and professionals of South Asia. These trainings took place in Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Government functionaries, journalists and staff members of international organisations participated in these training courses. In Bangladesh, 3-day residential training courses on migration are conducted where district level government functionaries, local government officials and staff members of grassroots NGOs are trained on migration governance issues. In order to encourage the bankers to provide customer friendly services to the migrants, about 1200 grassroots level bank officials were trained during the period of 2008 to 2012. RMMRU's video training kit and bank module has been incorporated in Bangladesh Institute of Bank Management (BIBM) training module.

⁹ Book: Making Dalals Visible: Towards Transparency in Recruitment, <http://www.rmmru.org/newsite/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Making-Dalals-Visible-Towards-Transparency-in-Recruitment.pdf>; Infographic: <http://www.rmmru.org/newsite/publications/infographic/>; Policy Brief: Experience of the fraudulence in the current migration system, <http://www.rmmru.org/newsite/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Policy-Brief-22.pdf>

¹⁰<http://www.rmmru.org/newsite/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Social-Cost-of-Migration.pdf>

It has been conducting pre-decision, pre-departure and TTC briefing sessions in 27 districts of Bangladesh. It includes a good number of training modules such as pre-decision and departing migrants training including country specific training modules for Oman and Saudi Arabia, Qatar, housekeeping training and health and life skill training for female migrants, ToT for training for five types of service providers i.e. TTC, DEMO, UDC officials, 333 call center staffs, and trade union members. RMMRU has a very good resource pool to conduct study, develop training curricula/manuals/modules etc.

Services at the grassroots

In 2006, RMMRU got directly involved in providing services at the grassroots. Since then, it has been operating in 27 districts. It is delivering 26 types of services in different project areas. The services include facilitation of securing passport, visa verification, registration for job in DEMO office, opening of bank account, assistance in migration loan processing, information counselling, psychosocial counselling to battered migrants particularly female, submission of online complaint against fraudulence, local arbitration, preparing papers for BMET arbitration, skills training scholarship for potential migrants, re-skilling scholarship for returned migrants, submission of application for compensation of injured and deceased migrants, filing cases in court and writ petitions in High Court Division, organising safe migration campaign, pre-decision, pre-departure and post-migration reintegration trainings, demonstration on online apps on SafeStep of migration, job fair, holding of remittance festival and *Shonar Manush* Award for migrants and their families and the service providers/grassroots level officials of TTC, DEMO, bankers, recruiting agencies and the sub-agents.

RMMRU implements its grassroots programme through forming different institutions. These are, Migrant Rights Protection Committee (MRPC), Grievance Management Committee (GMC), Youth Volunteer Group (YVG), Migration Service Centre (MSC) and Legal Support Cell. In 2020 alone, 2,00,000 aspirants, departing, and returnee migrants, as well as left - behind family members, received emergency support, information, referral and legal support, and counselling services from RMMRU. RMMRU has provided technical assistance to BMET in developing an online complaint mechanism in 2009 and helped BMET maintain that mechanism until 2020 by providing technical and manpower support. Subsequently, BMET itself took over the task. In 2018 RMMRU created a Legal Support Cell to bring cases to BMET for arbitration and facilitate those.

RMMRU utilises various tools in its information campaign. These include courtyard meeting, school/college based programme, miking, tea stall meeting, screening of telefilms etc. It also forges partnership with grassroots level NGOs, build their capacity on migration, remittance issues etc. RMMRU launched the first ever nationwide media campaign on migration in 2006. It developed issue based TV talk shows, Public Service Announcement (PSA), posted 60 mega signboards in different districts, more than 20 bill boards in Dhaka-Cumilla and Chattogram highway, produced telefilms, drama, short films etc. RMMRU is also

the pioneer organisation in launching a nationwide campaign on remittance transfer and effective use of remittances. In 2021 will launch its own YouTube channel.

MRPC: RMMRU pioneered the concept of forming community based organisations, the 'Migrant Rights Protection Committee' (MRPC) at the union level to disseminate relevant information to the aspirant, current and returned migrants and their left behind family members. It is an innovation of RMMRU to enhance knowledge and capacity on safe migration and remittance management in protection of migrant rights and reduce the vulnerability of migrant workers. Over the years, RMMRU developed its own model for ensuring safe migration and safe remittance management. MRPC is a 23-member body comprised of past and present UP chairmen and members, returned migrants, family member of migrants, local government representatives, teachers, students, journalists, and religious leaders. In 2021 about one thousand members of grassroots community are involved in MRPCs in different project areas of RMMRU. MRPCs are also playing a vital role in lodging of online complaints and organising awareness creating campaign at grassroots level such as courtyard meeting, *haat shabha*, miking, rallies, street theatre, video screening, and distributing leaflets.

Grievance Management Committee: Over the last five years RMMRU has concentrated on migration law related awareness and delivery of legal services in four ways. These are, helping migrants to file cases in courts, BMET arbitration, referring to ADR and conducting local mediation. Research findings that 19% of the aspirant migrants are cheated on an average BDT 243,247¹¹ and they do not want to go to court rather prefer redress at local level, pushed RMMRU to innovate a migration mediation model. The mediations are conducted by the local community, Youth Volunteer Group and district level migration service providers named Grievance Management Committee (GCM). During last three years through local level mediation RMMRU has helped cheated migrants to recover BDT 1,28,45,500 from the recruiting agents and sub agents as well as relatives.

Migrant Service Centre: A good section of migrants returned prematurely and in many instances they are tortured by the employers in the countries of destination. RMMRU is managing an emergency Migrant Service Centre (MSC) in Dakshinkhan, Dhaka since 2019. It provides a temporary shelter to female migrants. MSC dealt with cases in which returnee female migrants were not mentally stable or even did not remember their places of residence. It ensures food, medical treatment, legal assistance, locate their families and facilitate reintegrating with them. During the COVID-19 period, the centre became extremely helpful for thousands of migrants who had returned. Through this service centre, RMMRU provides food and conveyance assistance to 20,988 emergency returned migrants at the airport till May 2021.

Obhibashir Adalat: To disseminate legal awareness to a large audience RMMRU is hosting a live migrant's court titled *Obhibashir Adalat* on a national TV channel. A lawyer and a government functionary provide instant solutions to aggrieved migrants or members for

¹¹Mediation: A Path to take Migration Act 2013 at the door steps of migrants
<http://www.rmmru.org/newsite/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Policy-Brief-23.pdf>

their families, or suggest where to file a case when cheated by recruiting agencies, middlemen, fellow villagers, or by another migrant. Until May 2021 through 60 episodes this fortnightly programme has dealt with 2300 cases. Of those 200 have been resolved and another 645 cases have been filed with BMET and WEWB for arbitration. Over live telephone call a migrant from Qatar said, 'This the best programme on TV for us, our Prime Minister should watch this to know about our condition'.

Emergency Programme

Globalisation has significantly contributed in creating scope for marginalised people to access employment in countries outside of their origin. However, it also exposes the migrants to extreme situations during crisis period. Since the South East Asian financial crisis in 2006-2007, RMMRU has been actively involved in providing assistance to the migrants who had to return abruptly due to crisis. Similar services were also ensured after the global financial crisis in 2009-2010. It is the first organisation to generate online data of those who returned from Libya after the downfall of Gaddafi government. RMMRU placed the profile details of 10,000 Libya returnees in Bdjobs online portal to facilitate their employment.

Since the outbreak of COVID-19 as well, RMMRU is providing leadership in mobilising common action to support the migrants in countries of destination, those who had to return abruptly and the left behind family members of migrants. RMMRU and BCSM have organised a one-minute silence programme in different parts of the world to mourn those migrants and nationals who died of COVID-19 and wrote a letter to the UN Secretary General to take a stand on arbitrary detention, return, non-payment of due wages of the migrants. BCSM members have also written an open letter to the Prime Minister requesting her to take measures so that migrants and their family members brought under the COVID-19 support programme. 20 days later the Prime Minister announced allocation of BDT 500 crores for assisting those who returned prematurely. RMMRU has completed a research by mobilising nine BCSM partner organisations on the impact of COVID-19 on the left behind members of migrant households. Based on the findings RMMRU is currently campaigning to support distressed migrant households with emergency cash grants. As part of the campaign on safe migration and building awareness against COVID-19, RMMRU administered training to 5178 potential migrants.

Partnership and Networking

From its inception, RMMRU has been collaborating with government agencies like MoEWOE, MoFA, MoHA, a2i, NHRC, NLASO, TTC, WEWB, BOESL, DEMO, BAIRA, UDC, 333 call centres etc. RMMRU is the Secretariat of Bangladesh Civil Society for Migrants (BCSM), a network of leading NGOs/CSOs in Bangladesh working on labour migration. The Unit is represented in different international platforms. Currently it is in the advisory board of Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD).

RMMRU has been actively engaged in partnership and networking with reputed academic institutions. In 1998 it began a Higher Education Link Programme with the Refugee Studies

Centre of Oxford University, facilitated by the British Council for six years. From 2004 RMMRU has been a founding member of the Consortium on Non-Traditional Security (NTS) Asia, based in Singapore. It is also an active member of Migrant Forum in Asia based in Manila since 2006. In 2015, it became a member of Forum Asia based in Bangkok. Recently it has become member of Metropolis Asia. It has also partnered in different research consortiums. From 2003 to 2013, it was part of a five country consortia, 'Migrating out of Poverty' led by University of Sussex. It is a member of Collaborative Adaptation Research Initiative in Africa and Asia (CARIAA). Recently it has successfully completed a five-year research programme, Deltas, Vulnerability & Climate Change: Migration & Adaptation (DECCMA). It was also a member of a four country consortium led by the University of Southampton. RMMRU is a member of Asia Dialogue on Forced Migration (ADFM) based in Sydney. RMMRU is also a member of the Migration, Transformation and Sustainability (MISTY) research project of ESRC under GCRF Transformations to Sustainability programme consortium of seven countries with partners in the UK, Bangladesh, Ghana, the US, Belgium, the Netherlands and Sweden. RMMRU has been championing the campaign of Rohingya genocide. It participated in the Permanent People's Tribunal as specialist witness at the Kuala Lumpur session on State Crimes of Myanmar in October 2017. As a follow up to the event RMMRU organised a Rohingya Genocide convention in November 2017 in Dhaka.