



Bangladesh

Safe Migration for Bangladeshi Workers

Bangladesh has maintained an impressive track record on growth and development. In the past decade, the economy has grown at an average 6 percent and more than 16 million Bangladeshis have moved out of poverty since 2000. However, even with a growing economy there is still widespread poverty and underemployment motivating many Bangladeshis to migrate in search of better opportunities. As a result, almost half a million Bangladeshis migrate



overseas annually for employment purposes, mostly to the Middle East. Unfortunately, Bangladeshi migrants face considerable challenges and risks such as fraud and deception by recruiters, physical abuse and exploitation from employers, squalid living conditions, poor access to health care and insufficient pay for long work hours in difficult physical conditions, and social marginalization in host countries. Many go into debt to pay for migration, remit most earnings, achieve minimal savings, and have limited assistance for re-integration upon return home.

The Project:

In response, the JSDF signed a \$2.58 million grant agreement with BRAC to implement a pilot project on **Safe Migration for Bangladeshi Workers**, with the objective of reducing vulnerability of migrant workers and their families. The intended beneficiaries are Bangladesh's poorest and vulnerable people who seek employment opportunities abroad.

The pilot is being implemented across 80 upazilas (sub-districts) in 20 districts and aims to **benefit 864,000 migrants** and their families. The project will target the poorest and most vulnerable in Bangladesh who may consider migration for economic gain to better their lives and the life of their families.

“This project has great potential for reducing the vulnerability of potential migrants and their families by enhancing information flows about migrant rights, the migration process, affordable financing, and remittance management.”

-Christine Kimes, Acting Country Head, the World Bank Bangladesh.

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The Japan Social Development Fund (JSDF) was established in June 2000 by the Government of Japan and the World Bank as a mechanism for providing direct assistance to the poorest and most vulnerable groups in eligible World Bank group member countries.

and remuneration in host countries.

Project Focus and Components:

The project is innovative firstly because there are no programs in Bangladesh -- a country with enormous numbers of mostly poor, low-skilled people migrating for employment -- of significant scope and scale that address the desperate situation in which many migrant workers find themselves. By providing information and linkages to a host of services -- from finance to training -- it allows potential migrants to make more informed choices and thereby avoid unfortunate and costly-to-reverse migration mistakes.

The project has 3 inter-locking components:

- **Identification of Community-Based Organizations for Information and Services:** Improve potential migrant workers' access to information and services for promoting safe migration at the community level.
- **Pre-Departure Preparation through Information Sharing and Training:** Provide information and linkages to training to better prepare potential migrants to safely move through the migration process and increase the scope for better employment

- **Consultation, Monitoring and Evaluation:** Facilitate consultation and coordination between key actors and establish a sound monitoring and evaluation system to measure the program's impact and effectiveness for promoting and sustaining safe migration.

The project is being executed by **BRAC**, one of the largest and oldest NGOs in the world, Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (**BRAC**).



Community-ownership Model:

The JSDF pilot is an example of **active participation** of the community in project design. A 2007 JSDF seed grant financed a participatory workshop in Dhaka on migration, bringing together key stakeholders from government, NGOs, civil society, development

Box 1 - Bangladeshi Migrant Workers

Remittances from migrant workers in the fiscal year 2012-3 amounted to more than \$14 billion and account for approximately 9% of GDP. Remittances are thus a major source of Bangladesh's foreign exchange earnings. At the family level, they enable poor households to obtain better nutrition, education, and health care for family members, and thus play a vital role in the fight against poverty.

“During the recent past, there has been a significant rise in work-related temporary overseas migration for export of services. Migrant remittances provide direct, immediate and far reaching benefits to the country,”

-Mahabub Hossain PhD, Executive Director, BRAC

partners and host countries. The two-day workshop identified key risks facing migrants, mitigation measures underway and innovative approaches to address migration challenges.

During its first year of implementation, the project has raised awareness among various stakeholders at the central, district and field levels through sensitization workshops – these have been well-attended by government, NGOs, journalists and academics. In addition, the project utilizes volunteers, including returnee migrants, working through the Community Based Organizations, thereby tapping into local expertise and knowledge.

Results and Outcomes:

Migrant-specific vulnerabilities will be reduced by enhancing the social protection for migrants through information about social and human rights, and by enhancing support for migrants during the recruitment process, in the host country, and upon their return to Bangladesh. As this project targets those who are among the poorest and most marginalized in Bangladesh society, its poverty reduction and social equity imperatives are strong and in-line with the World Bank's poverty reduction objective. Other outcomes include:

Increased access to resources and information: In order to improve potential migrant workers' access to information and services for promoting safe migration and ensuring that potential migrants are well informed as they decide on whether to pursue migration.

Increased knowledge and awareness: 864,000 potential migrants and their families receive orientation on the migration process, financing options and better remittance management.

Increased livelihood Impact: At least 30 percent of potential migrants report reduced dependency on middlemen, leading to lower costs of migration, and 10 percent of migrants and their families show improved management of remittances.

Sustainability:

The Government of Bangladesh has shown a keen interest in this pilot. Safe migration is an increasingly important issue in Bangladesh with regular media coverage of migration problems, leading to public outcry for government action. The Government recognizes the growing severity of the issue and the lack of knowledge and capacity to implement effective mechanisms has prompted it to seek support to further solidify its own efforts to help and protect migrant workers and ensures its sustainability.

The World Bank country program in Bangladesh has a strong social protection agenda, which encapsulates this work on safe migration. With a growing social protection and labor agenda in Bangladesh, and following a recent request for support from the Government, the World Bank is exploring the scope for a potential operation on safe migration and skills development, using lessons learned and design features of the JSDF pilot that proved effective.

Box 2-Project Data

- *Grant (TF098993) Amount: \$2.58 million*
- *Implementing Agency: BRAC*
- *Implementation Period: 2013-2016*

Box 3-BRAC Migration Programme helped me to return home safely!

“I went to Jordan as a housemaid in August 2013. I worked without wages and claimed my salary several times. They started torturing me both physically and mentally. I tried to communicate with my husband but I failed. After 14 month of slavery, I escaped from the jobs and I called my husband. My husband communicated with Md. Delwar Hossain, CBO Facilitator of Migration Programme, BRAC. He complained at the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET – the Government arm responsible for migration) with proper documents and rescued me from Jordan through BMET. Now I am safe. BRAC Migration Programme helped me to return home safely.”

-Shahana Pervin Rupa

Local organizations working on this issue will be able to join forces with other partners in new alliances established through the pilot, and continue their work in a more coordinated and targeted manner. Given increasing awareness of migration problems, safe migration is an area of priority engagement for a number of development partners, which could be further encouraged by the JSDF taking a leading role on this issue now.

Future Outlook:

The successful model has a potential to be replicated and expanded! With 60 percent of its population in the working age bracket (15-49 years), the large workforce

represents a demographic dividend for the country. It is unlikely that the domestic economy will be able to absorb the two million entrants in the labor force each year and overseas migration has the potential to become a valuable safety net for those unemployed at home and an important avenue for poverty reduction. In 2013, about 8.7 million workers were employed overseas, and remittance flows amounted to around US\$14 billion, or 9 percent of GDP. Bangladesh is now among the top ten remittance-receiving countries globally. Almost two-thirds of Bangladesh's remittances originate from the Middle East. The most common destination in international migration is Saudi Arabia (31 percent), followed by United Arab Emirates (27 percent), and Malaysia (8 percent).

Although during the global economic crisis, there was a strong increase in the number of returning Bangladeshi migrants, recent economic upswings could lead to a resurgence of those seeking to migrate. The current work of JSDF comes at an opportune time to pilot innovations for supporting safe migration. In addition, there is considerable potential for scaling-up given the wide-spread nature of migration among the Bangladeshi population and increasing public awareness of its challenges and risks.

In addition, all information from the project will be stored and made available to government entities and other stakeholders working in the area of migration. The information will provide migration stakeholders with a better understanding of the realities of migration, particularly in areas that currently lack safe migration support systems and with significant numbers of people migrating or considering migration.