



 Policy Forum on
**Fairer Labour
Migration**

Event Report **Rangunia**

May 2017

Investment awareness and opportunities for remittance needed



The Event

IID Policy Forum on fairer labour migration was held on 21 May 2017 in Rangunia, Chittagong. The forum was organised by Institute of Informatics and Development (IID) in partnership with Young Power in Social Action (YPSA). The participants at this multi-stakeholder event discussed issues that impede the transparency of the migration process. They added local context and their own experiences to explain why fairer labour migration is not being facilitated by the local and national actors.



The Discussion

The session focused on problems experienced by aspirant and returnee migrants. During the event, the participants identified number of challenges in the migration process.

Migration and remittances have been the major source of asset and capital accumulation for the rural people. Skilled and rich migrants spend more in abroad, low-skilled and poorer migrants tend to send their hard earned money to their homeland. However, many end up spending their hard-earned

money in consumption and in non-profiting expenditures such as renovating house, spending in social events and consumer goods. As a result, many returnee migrants end up not having enough cash to support their families when they grow old.

Other issues that were discussed include- Aspirant migrants complained that they **lack information** at every steps- from leaving their doorstep to boarding a flight. Hence, they resort to recruiting agents and middlemen who can provide the prerequisite information to immigrate to destination country. As such is the case, many migrants are unaware of the necessary documents and the procedures involved in processing them. Moreover, they are incognisant of the functions and location of certain government institutions like the District Employment and Manpower Office (DEMO) and passport office.

Lack of certification make it harder for migrant workers to find work after reaching destination country. As the potential migrants are almost bereft of proper documentation, they seek informal channels for approval to emigrate to destination country. The middlemen and recruiting agencies often bypass the law by not showing the contract papers well in advance, thereby leaving the migrants completely in dark about the job



description.

Corruption resulting from the political economy of migration related business still impedes fairer labour migration. There are many actors who indulge in rent seeking activities and there are allegations against both public and private agencies who provide services to the aspirant migrants.

Potential migrants are oblivious of the **culture, etiquettes, language, rules, regulations** and social expectations of the destination countries. These lead to awkward situations and exploitations often resulting in destination countries deporting them.

Existing **migration visa policy**, more prominently in the Middle East has loopholes that are used for illegal visa trading. For instance, the *Kafala* system mandates that aspirant migrants are to be sponsored by migrants residing in destination country. The visas can be sold to highest bidders and since the vendee migrants are ignorant of checking mechanism, the visas are often sold to multiple parties leading to visa fraud. Furthermore, as information is scarce, oftentimes there are cases where the mentioned job description, salary, working hours, accommodation and benefits do not coincide with the sponsors' information.

Bangladeshi **consulates and High Commissions** could do more to render assistance, support and guidance to struggling migrants in destination countries. They need to ensure that the migrants do not face ill-treatment and misbehaviour from the officials when seeking help.

The Suggestions

After the discussion round, the participants were asked to form small groups to discuss solutions and provide some policy suggestions. The following suggestions were given by the groups.

Create **awareness among migrants and their families** regarding savings, sensible investment and spending for future. Government support for safer investment opportunities in the rural areas was highly recommended.

Create a mechanism through government that would enable **distribution of visa** based on the skill-set of the aspirant migrants.

Set up **help centres and information desks** at the Union level to provide information related to



migration, to assist in preparing passport documents and to checking visa status. If possible, provide other mechanisms that make visa checking easier. Existing Union Digital Centre can be used too.

Strengthen the **role and function of High Commissions** to ensure migrants receive adequate support and protection.

Establish **monitoring, accountability and complaint** system to moderate institutions and actors involved in the migration process, including consulates and High Commissions.

Create awareness about existing migration laws and labour rights among aspirant migrants. Use local channels to communicate easily with the people.

Make allocations in the national budget for the **welfare of expatriates** living abroad.

Reduce the government fee for passport and other services.

Increase the **Accidental Death Benefit** paid to family member of dead migrant.

Inquire corruption allegations arised and take steps to enable Gulf Approved Medical Centres

Association (GAMCA) certified medical institutions at the local level to **provide genuine medical reports** without any harassment.

Establish training centres at district level for aspirant migrants to ensure easy access to local training and reduce training cost.

Make existing **police verification process** easier and transparent by monitoring.

Create synergy between origin and destination countries to **improve coordination** and better serve migrant needs.

The Policy Forum

IID Policy Forum- also known as 'AncholikAlapon' in Bangla, is a discussion series that brings grassroots voice to national policy process. Typically organized at the local level, the series follows an innovative and adaptive format to conduct policy discussions involving multi stakeholder from local communities. There is no designated Chairperson or special guests in the forums where participants get engaged as equals. A specific set of groundwork and pre-event activities ensure a non-hierarchical active involvement by different stakeholders.



IID's policy advocacy for Fairer Labour Migration (FLM) is part of the PROKAS (Promoting Knowledge for Accountable Systems) project. PROKAS is funded by the UK's Department for International Development and implemented by a consortium led by the British Council, supported by Palladium and WISE Development.

The issues

While the migratory workers contribute to the huge remittance base, they have to deal with various problems before and after reaching destination countries. These problems ensue because the migration process is devoid of transparency, accountability and access to information, giving rise to informal mechanisms. Consequently, cost of migration goes up, imposing the burden on aspirant migrants. Once they have migrated overseas, they face harassment and discrimination, both financially and socially. While supporting evidence of this exploitation exists, little attention is being given to make the process fairer and efficient.

The Participants

Participants of this forum included representatives from IID and YPSA, local political leaders, teachers, NGO activists, other CSOs, representatives from field administration, journalists, students, youth group representatives, aspirant migrants and returnee migrants. Among the participants, there were 46 male and 17 female participants who actively engaged and participated in the discussion.

