

**Report on the Workshop on
“Advancing Development through Partnership and Collective Action:
Enriching Migration Cycle”**

Date: 24 February 2020

Time: 10:30 am to 01:00 pm

Venue: BURO Bangladesh Conference Hall, Dhaka, Bangladesh



INAFI Bangladesh Foundation and BASUG, the Europe-based diaspora organization in collaboration with Bangladesh Civil Society for Migration (BCSM) and BURO Bangladesh organized this workshop on **“Advancing Development through Partnership and Collective Action: Enriching Migration Cycle”**. The workshop was held on 24 February 2020 from 10:30 am to 01:00 pm at BURO Bangladesh Conference Hall in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Participants were the representatives from the civil society organizations, NGOs and MFIs specially working for the migrants or have programmes for migrants and their family members. Barrister Shameem Haider Patwary, MP and Member of Parliamentarians' Caucus on Migration and Development who was supposed to attend the program as chief guest was unable to attend due to an urgent engagement.

The event started with the screening of a short video documentary featuring BASUG’s background and its endeavour towards the advancement of the Bangladeshi migrant communities not only within Bangladesh but also in different European countries through developing effective partnership. Mr. Bikash Chowdhury Barua, Chairman of BASUG International in his welcome address called for concerted efforts to make the migration useful for all. He highlighted the objectives of the Global Compact on Migration to ensure safe, orderly and regular migration. This workshop, he added, is being organized at a time when migration across Europe and the developed countries, unfortunately and to our utter frustration, is being seen as a ‘threat’ and not as an ‘opportunity’. He emphasized that, we ought to change this notion and that has to be done through partnership and collective action.

The workshop was designed to discuss and explore possible solutions regarding four different but interlinked aspects of the migration cycle. The discussion session was moderated by migration expert Mr. Asif Munier. Four proficient practitioners who are working for the rights of the migrants for a long time

starting from directly providing services at the grassroots level to policy level advocacy with the government of Bangladesh were:

Prof. Chowdhury Abrar, Executive Director, RMMRU spoke on the theme, *“Policy level advocacy for the protection of migrants' rights in CoO and CoD- Strengthening partnership among Civil Society Organizations, NGOs-INGOs, Diaspora Organizations and the Government”*. Thanking the organizers, he said that, the documentary on BASUG helped him to understand more about the huge involvement of the diaspora organizations in the development of the migrants. In his speech, he addressed the context of the labour migrants as well as the diaspora migrants with importance. He called for more close collaboration between the diaspora and the CSOs in the CoO to address the plight of the less fortunate migrants in vulnerable condition. He stepwise discussed every aspect of different stages of migration i.e. before departure from the country of origin, during stay in the country of destination, after return to the country of origin; where policy level advocacy should be strengthened not only to protect the rights of the migrants within the country but also to ensure their rights outside the country. He wrapped up his speech by highlighting some important points as follows:

- Collate evidence and narratives of violation of rights
- Build alliance with civil society organizations in the CoD for raising awareness among migrants on national laws, services available, engage in policy advocacy and protection services
- Mobilise national media and social media to highlight the problems faced by migrants
- Strengthen civil society platforms at national and regional levels to share good practices
- Provide critical analysis of new policies and laws, their amendments through collective evaluation
- Present a united voice on migration issues in the SDG platform at national, regional and international levels

Mr. Syed Saiful Haque, Chairman, WARBE Development Foundation, started his speech remembering the Ex-Executive Director of INAFI Late Mr. Atiqun Nabi with respect. Stating Mr. Nabi's tireless efforts for the development of the sector, he recalled that only a few years back INAFI with the leadership of Mr. Nabi organized a successful workshop on migration ahead of GFMD in this same venue where many of us were present.

Mr. Haque spoke on the theme, *“Access to skill development opportunities and suitable migration related information to prevent unsafe migration”*. He acknowledged his limitation of not having any direct experience on this skills development field. He briefly discussed the definition of migration cycle which starts from taking the decision to migrate and ends with the reintegration of the returnee migrant. He urged that, it is important to protect the rights of the migrants in every stage of migration and for that availability of suitable information and easy access to that information is essential. He said, there are evidence that the recruiting agencies are more interested to send unskilled workers as they can easily exploit them. On the other hand, due to lack of job specific skills Bangladeshi workers are paid low wages abroad. He emphasized on proper reintegration of the returnee migrants through utilizing their skills in the country of origin. He shared from his experience that he knew a migrant who was designated with a very responsible job overseas of supervising a large ship with hundreds of crews working under him. A few years back he met him again selling caps in Dhaka city. The person's working contract ended so he had to return to the country and due to lack of relevant job opportunity here he ended up selling caps for living. Sharing this example Mr. Haque stated that the GOB should take initiative to certify these skilled human resources which will not only help the process of restoration of the returnee migrants but also benefit the country as well.

Mr. Shakirul Islam, Chairman, Ovivashi Karmi Unnayan Program (OKUP) spoke on another particularly important theme, *“Collective action for social and economic reintegration of the returnee migrants-existing initiatives, challenges and recommendations”*. In his presentation, he categorized the returnee migrant workers into 3 types- Return with success, Returning being unsuccessful and Return being victim of abuse and exploitation-rights violations.

He articulated about the currently existing initiatives by the Bangladesh govt. as well as the private sector for the labour migrants. He mentioned about the existing laws and policies of the country protecting the rights of the migrant workers. Besides the laws and policies, the Govt. has some skill development initiatives as well. However, through the Wage Earner’s Welfare Board (WEWB) the govt. provides some emergency support to the victim/sick migrants as well as extend support for the deceased migrants. Contribution from WEWB also includes mandatory insurance for all outbound migrant workers. Moreover, there is the specialized bank for the migrants by the govt- Probashi Kallyan Bank (PKB). On the other hand, still there are no private banks and financial institutes or exchange houses that offer loan program for the returnee migrant workers. Only some banks have some attractive offers for high-end migrants. He added that, there are a handful of CSOs, NGOs and Migrants’ Organizations like- BRAC, OKUP, BNSK, RMMRU, WARBE DF, BOMSA, Awaj Foundation, who have mentionable interventions for the returnee migrant workers.

Speaking of all the available resources and initiatives the speaker pointed out the challenges and specified some concrete recommendations to overcome the challenges as follows:

- A special wing/department under the MoEWOE should take responsibility to deal with ‘return and reintegration’ of migrant workers
- A comprehensive action plan for ‘reintegration’ should be in place
- Bring banks/exchange houses on board to develop migrant friendly reintegration support package
- Build trusted partnership between GO, NGO, banks/exchange houses for implementation of reintegration projects
- Take practical actions to make functional of existing development programs and support services to render support and services for migrant workers
- Introduce SSNP for the vulnerable migrant workers in the up-coming national budget for better protection of returnee migrant workers

Country Coordinator, BASUG, Finland, Dr. Mojibur Doftori, was the last speaker at the workshop and he shared his views through a different perspective. Being a representative of Bangladeshi diaspora, he spoke on the theme, *“Use of Diaspora Resources in Guiding Migration Policies and Practices: The Case of Bangladeshi Diaspora in Europe”*. In his presentation he emphasized on the fact that, diaspora resources are underutilized in both the country of origin as well as in the host country. He said professional diaspora people can play a vital role in formulating better migration and development policies for benefitting both countries. He sighted the immense contribution of some of the best-known South Asian migrants to the West such as Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Muhammad Yunus, Fazle Hasan Abed and others who proved that migrants possess unique skills and experiences and can change the course of history in a more positive direction.

He also highlighted on the need of policy innovation to rationalize and improve school educational system of Bangladesh to build cooperative learning culture and empathy in the students. In the long run this will lead to create human resources with improved professional skills as well as better language and intercultural communication skills which will be useful both at home and abroad.

Open Discussion:



The moderator very skillfully conducted the open discussion session. Many important though fundamental issues were brought under discussion by the participants which are as follows:

- The significance of enhancing the capacity and efficiency of the Technical Training Centers (TTC) was pointed out. The role of TTC is essential to ensure safe migration with a respectful career prospect by making the labour migrants equipped with demand-based skills and necessary information.
- Multicultural orientation is not a common practice in the country. Labour migrants face difficulties in adapting with the cultural diversity of the country of destination due to lack of multicultural orientation.
- Digital and media literacy for the labour migrants is another important aspect to work on.
- The dynamics of migration is changing, and the challenges are changing accordingly. Such as- UAE closed labour recruitment from Bangladesh since 2012. However, there is a provision of “investor visa” and now to migrate to UAE Bangladeshi people are taking that visa. So, it is time to think differently to address different aspects of migration.
- It was urged that, repetition of the recent incident which took place in Malaysia is not desirable where 78 Bangladeshis were detained as illegal immigrants.
- Govt. is the biggest stakeholder of this sector. Govt should take necessary action for community mobilization which is very much important to ensure safe migration through enhancing awareness and access to information.
- Restoration in Govt. organizations is required. For an example, PKB has diversified products in documentation however many of those are not functional.
- Proper measures should be taken by the govt. to recognize the skills of the migrants so that even after coming back to the country they can flourish utilizing their skill.
- Strong partnership is required for mechanism development to support migration. Discussants appealed all the civil society organizations and NGOs that are dedicatedly working on migration issue to come forward in this regard. A realistic Action Plan must be developed to address the challenges in the path of successful labour migration and to enrich the migration cycle. Initiative should be taken not only in documentation but also in practical.

- It is time for the networks to be proactive and work in more structured way for ensuring safe migration. The networks are currently working hard for sustainable reintegration which is praiseworthy. They should also focus on doing advocacy to bring change in respective law and policy and emphasize on improvement in skills development.
- Activism is necessary to change the scenario of the Bangladeshi migrants for better.

Last but not the least, on behalf of the organizers Ms. Mahbuba Haque, the Executive Director of INAFI Bangladesh proposed vote of thanks towards the honorable guests, invaluable participants and all. As INAFI has not been directly engaged with migration related programmes in recent years, many of the participant organizations were not aware about INAFI and its nature of work. So firstly Ms. Haque took the opportunity to share with the audience about INAFI in brief.

Then she expressed her cordial gratitude towards all the participants for their valuable and active participation to make the event a successful one. She said, presence of majority invitees shows their strong commitment to work together for finding solutions to overcome the impediments in the development of migrants.

She shared her sincere appreciation towards the honourable speakers for their kind efforts to reflect their valuable thoughts and experiences through the topics specified for them. Their resourceful remarks have enlightened all and created room for a constructive discussion. She expressed her special thanks to the honourable moderator for his efforts in giving an excellent coverage to the presentation and discussion session. She thanked specially Mr. Haque, Chairman, WARBE Development Foundation and WARBE team for their kind support in getting in touch with the Chief Guest of the event.

She shared her hearty thanks to Mr. Zakir Hossain, ED, BURO Bangladesh for extending his generous support towards INAFI as always and gladly accepting the proposal to share the venue for the event. She also thanked BURO team for the perfect logistic support and kind cooperation.

She showed her heartfelt thanks to Mr. Chowdhury Barua, Chairman, BASUG. She mentioned that BASUG Bangladesh is the associate member of INAFI and BASUG Netherlands is a good friend of INAFI since 2006. As part of this INAFI together with BASUG has implemented a couple of projects providing technical support to the migrants and their families. Moreover, in recent years both jointly have organized a few thematic workshops focusing on migration related issues.

Finally, she thanked INAFI team for their dedication and hard work to make the event a successful one.