

BRAC Migration Program: A Lighthouse for Migrants

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OVERSEAS migration of Bangladeshis is contributing significantly to the Bangladeshi economy. These migrant workers are the unsung heroes of the country. Their stories are both the stories of hope and despair. Each year, over half a million people go abroad to fulfill a dream of a better future for themselves and their families.

Bangladesh received almost fifteen billion US dollars of remittance by its workers abroad in 2016 and almost thirteen billion US dollars in 2017.¹ During the 2015-2016 fiscal years, the remittance ranged from almost 8 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) of Bangladesh in 2015 to 6 percent in 2016.² The remittance earnings are more than the total amount of foreign aid (two billion US dollars) or foreign direct investment (1.3 billion US dollars) that the country received. Only the earnings from garment exports at twenty-eight billion US dollars are higher than remittance earnings. Migration becomes therefore a major contributing factor in Bangladesh's economy. Moreover, with an increasing migration rate, remittances are expected to play an even more prominent role in the future which will help Bangladesh become a middle income country by 2020.

Overseas Migration

According to the United Nations Population Fund (IMPFA), there is economic growth potential “from shifts in a population’s age structure, mainly when the share of the working-age population (15 to 64 years old) is larger than the non-working-age share of the population (14 years old and younger, and 65 years old and older).”³ In other words, “economic productivity ... occurs when there are growing numbers of people in the workforce relative to the number of dependents.”⁴ Due to the rise of the working age population, two million young people are added to the labor force each year, making it difficult to accommodate them in the domestic labor market. Here overseas migration plays a crucial role in absorbing the new entrants to the job market.

Migration has become so popular in Bangladesh that migrant workers constitute 4.9 percent of the total working age population of Bangladesh.⁵ Evidently overseas migration, especially labor migration, has been one of the prime catalysts for the rapid economic development and livelihood development of Bangladesh. On the other hand, the migrant workers' story is full of exploitation, failed migration, harassment, trafficking and other problems. Besides, high overseas migration cost and lack of skilled workers are the main obstacles in reaping the full potential benefits from migration.

In Bangladesh, overseas migrant workers, the actors behind this economic development and growth, have to deal with great difficulties to get necessary services from authentic and recognized formal source. Since government services and private recruiting agencies are mainly operated from large cities, migrants from the rural areas have difficulty getting proper information and service. There are District Employment Manpower Offices (DEMOS) at the migrant worker-prone districts, but their scope of work is very minimal relative to the huge service demand of the Bangladeshis. Also there are very few civil society and private sector service providers in migrant worker-prone communities.

Without information and services at the grassroots level, people often choose the informal and unsafe channels of migration. One of the reasons for the high migration cost is the informal migration procedures which are traditionally managed and organized by brokers who work for private recruiting agencies. A large number of aspirant migrant workers become victims of unethical practices of recruiting agencies, operating in collaboration with the so-called *dalals* (brokers), and are forced to pay an excessively high price for migration-related procedures. As a result, Bangladeshis face some of the highest migration costs in the world, ranging from 1,675 to 5,145 US dollars.⁶ *Dalals* and recruiting agencies receive a big amount as commission for facilitating the migration process.⁷ The rest is spent on airfare, passport, visa, medical certificate, and other expenses.

Issues

There is a no reliable channel or services to trust at the community regarding overseas jobs. The potential migrant workers do not know how to register for overseas jobs, obtain a passport, purchase an airticket and know the cost involved in processing documents for migration. In addition, they do

not know how and where to get a medical check-up and loan for migration. The costs associated with this process become very high due to several layers of *dalals* involved in the whole process. Anecdotal information suggests that there are more than 50,000 *dalals* currently active in the labor export sector of Bangladesh. High migration cost has become a major hurdle for overseas migration and a high source of risk for migrant workers given the poverty level of potential migrant households.

Most of the overseas migrant workers from Bangladesh predominantly belong to less-skilled category that leaves them in a vulnerable position in terms of both net remittance earnings and their bargaining power with employers. According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Employment and Training (BMET), of the half a million Bangladeshis migrating annually for overseas jobs most have no skills training, working with a very low wages and face vulnerabilities. Under these conditions, less-skilled workers from Bangladesh are at an increased risk of forced labor, exploitation, abuse, and even human trafficking in their destination countries. Some find themselves in situations of forced labor or debt bondage where they face restrictions on their movements, non-payment of wages, threats, and physical or sexual abuse.

Another risk associated with this practice is the failure to recover the amount paid to *dalals* by the applicants who fail to fly to destination countries due to unexpected circumstances. Migrant workers are often promised overseas employment in certain occupations at certain wages which are not met due to the fraudulent practices of *dalals*. Most of the migrant workers do not get their expected job and salary (as promised by *dalals* or agencies) when they start working abroad. This leads workers to resort to staging strikes or escaping from their existing employers in search of other jobs. This leads to harassment by law enforcement agencies in the destination countries. Finally, they are migrating without receiving training or information related to country of destination (legal rights and duties of foreign workers, cultural sensitivities, and the physical environment), and even airport formalities.

A big number of overseas migrant workers who return each year to Bangladesh cannot contribute to the national economy of the country due to lack of knowledge and information on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) or business advisory services at the community level. They face various problems including lack of information on prevailing business trends and lack of advisory services for new business start-ups and job op-

portunities in Bangladesh. The scenario is the same for both male and female migrant workers. They bring back new knowledge and skills from the experience they obtain through overseas employment. But due to lack of information and services at the community level for returnee migrant workers to start up a new business, they are spending money in a very unproductive way and not able to change their economic situation even after their return.

In summary, the Bangladeshi migrant workers face major problems. The potential migrants do not have the necessary information and knowledge available before making a decision to travel for overseas jobs. There is a lack of public or private institutions at the district level to develop their soft⁸ and hard⁹ skills needed in the jobs abroad. They have difficulty gathering funds to migrate. After returning home, they often fail to sustain their economically uplifted condition due non-availability of knowledge on productive utilization of remittance, entrepreneurship development and financial support for new business creation.

BRAC Migration Program

To address the issues faced by the migrant workers, the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) Migration Program started its intervention in 2006. The program is designed to fill the void in three specific areas: lack of knowledge and information regarding migration and its formalities; pervasive cheating and criminal activities by fraudulent migration agencies; and lack of contact between host country agencies and Bangladeshi agencies. The BRAC Migration Program operates to improve the migration process in migrant worker-prone communities in Bangladesh.

Program Goal, Objectives, Focus

The BRAC Migration Program aims to ensure safe migration of skilled Bangladeshi workers and to support the sustainable livelihood of the migrant workers and their family members.

Specifically, the program has the following objectives:

- To ensure safe migration of Bangladeshi migrant workers at three stages of migration;
- To increase access to essential information and services for migrant workers and family members;

- To facilitate socio-economic reintegration of returnee migrant workers;
- To influence migration policy through advocacy, networking and media mobilization; and
- To promote innovation and best practices to improve safe migration.

BRAC Migration Program Milestone

The BRAC Migration Program started as a pilot project under the Safe Migration Facilitation Centre (SMFC) initiative of BRAC. It started with awareness-raising activities to promote safe migration among the thirty-six migrant worker-prone sub-districts of Bangladesh. The safe migration awareness campaign in the community started with volunteers, in addition to establishment of community-based organizations (CBOs). These CBOs are community-based voluntary migration forums working as a community-based information and support mechanism. The members are local people including returnee migrant workers. These CBOs were immediately recognized and accepted by the migrant workers and their family.

The urgency of providing support for victims of fraudulent recruitment schemes started the legal aid support system for the cheated migrant workers under the program. This legal aid support is provided in collaboration with BRAC's Human Rights and Legal Aid Services (HRLS) program. However, in most cases, cheated migrant workers and their families do not have the required documents to go through the legal procedure. For this reason many cases failed to get filed at the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET). The program added the component of helping migrant workers recover the lost money through a social arbitration process. The community volunteer and CBO member discuss the cases with influential people in the community and create pressure on the *dalals* to return the money. The community volunteers contribute greatly in this process. They are continuously working at the community level to disseminate safe migration information, and assist the BRAC Migration Program people in organizing community-based awareness campaigns at local areas.

The program expanded its geographical coverage by working in six SMFCs by early 2010. At this point, a migration alliance network National Alliance for Migrants Rights, Bangladesh (NAMR, B) was initiated. NAMR, B

started as an informal migration alliance network. The program undertook several advocacy initiatives separately and jointly with the alliance.

The program went through great transition during the 2011-2012 period. It secured BRAC's core fund under the Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) that continued to support the six SMFC-based interventions to promote safe migration. During this period, the introduction of Migration Loan Program for the migrants was one of the major initiatives of BRAC. The program also undertook three pilot projects with the International Labour Organization (ILO) during this period. These projects aimed to promote safe internal migration and decent workplace for internal women migrants. An advisory standardized information package was developed for the local government and internal migration stakeholders by the end of the project period (2016). At this time, foreign migrant workers in Libya were facing crisis situation. The program worked side by side with government in an emergency response to aid the Bangladesh migrant worker returnees from Libya. The program also assisted the government in creating a database for migrant worker returnee from Libya.

Finally, during this period, the program had the crucial change of moving from project approach to that of programmed approach. From early 2013, apart from the ongoing SPA-funded project, the program started implementing other significant projects. The program started implementing a project with Japan Social Development Fund, which was managed by World Bank. The program again expanded its geographical coverage to ten more SMFCs covering most of the migrant worker-prone areas of Bangladesh.

In this course, the program partnered with eighty local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) – under the World Bank fund. The program started to implement UNWomen-supported pilot project for returnee migrant workers reintegration support, specially focused on women. Besides, income generating activities and small and medium enterprises (IGA-SME) skill development trainings were also provided to the returnees under the SPA-funded project. These trainings developed the capacity of the returnee migrant workers to engage with IGA-SME. In 2015, the program partnered with ILO with a pilot project to develop the capacity of potential woman migrant workers to avoid trafficking.

The program developed internal capacity with increased human resource; development of comprehensive packages of information, education and communication (IEC) and behavior change communication (BCC) mate-

rials; creation of migration program trainer pool; and trained a pool of over a thousand community volunteers. The program also initiated community-based voluntary language school. The program signed a memorandum of understanding with the government on capacity-building on migration.

In recent years, the program increased advocacy and communication effort. The program undertook a series of advocacy initiatives engaging the government, migration organizations, journalists, national and international institutes, migration experts, and think tanks. The program revitalized the National Alliance for Migrants Rights, Bangladesh (NAMR, B). Besides, the program also partnered with various international alliances and networks like CARAM Asia, Centre for Asia-Pacific Initiatives (CAPI) located at the University of Victoria (Australia), and Migration and Development Civil Society Network (MADE).

In 2016 BRAC developed a new plan on comprehensive pre-departure and reintegration support. Since the scope for donor-supported interventions shrank after Bangladesh was declared a lower middle-income country in 2015, only a self-sustaining approach could ensure the continuance of need-based services for migrants, and the social enterprise approach fitted in best. Using this approach, the program established a number of comprehensive, accessible and authentic service bases in districts prone to migration.

How the Migration Program Works

The program has a series of services that address three major stages in the migration cycle: decision-making, pre-departure preparation and reintegration into society.

Safe migration campaigns

The program provides information to grassroots communities through various awareness-raising activities such as interpersonal communication, interactive popular theater (IPT), video show, court yard meeting, *miking* (loudspeaker announcement), school quiz, pre-decision orientation, day celebration, workshops, seminars, etc.

The IPT and other awareness campaign activities reveal the real problems related to migration to the people in the community, getting them sensitized about the issues as a consequence. The theater shows are staged at the grassroots level.



IPT is part of the popular theater program of BRAC which has the following objectives:¹⁰

- To build up awareness against all sorts of crimes/wrongdoings, injustices and corruption in the community;
- To stimulate the poor to build up their capacity, self-reliance, and self-confidence;
- To promote active participation of the oppressed people of the community in their wellbeing;
- To complement in the achievement of the objectives of other rural development initiatives of BRAC; and
- To promote folk culture of rural Bangladesh by using theatre in the development of people.

The IPT team conducts area studies to collect information on local incidents and facts on migration. After the study, they produce an IPT story based on local incidents. The IPT show entitled *Shapno Dekhi Bidesh Jabo* (Towards a Dream) is based on real stories. Currently, more than fifty IPT teams are raising awareness and disseminating safe migration information in migrant worker-prone districts of Bangladesh.

BRAC's theater shows have three major parts as discussed in a report:¹¹

Performing the theatre:

A place centrally located in the village is preferred for the theatre venue as it is likely to be convenient for all villagers from any part of the villages to attend the show. The venue is selected as such that there is enough room for the audiences to sit in front and in sides of the stage. Liaison is made with community leaders and villagers around the venue so that the theatre can be held without any disturbance. [Programme Organizer, Social Development Programme] PO SDP and Communication Worker go around the village and invites everybody they come across to attend the theatre particularly women. Elected public leaders, local elite, NGO leaders, and government officials all from their and neighbouring villages are especially invited to the theatre. The PO SDP compulsorily and other POs, such as PO Micro Finance from the Area Office, voluntarily attend the theatre to assist the team in their performance.

Dialogue session:

At the end of the play a dialogue session is conducted by the BRAC staff and theatre team with the audiences. The session in fact is the continuation of the dialogue between the players and the audiences that has already been started during the play. The session has three dimensions:

- An organizer, usually PO SDP, of the theatre facilitates the audiences to express their perspectives, opinions, responses, and reactions based on what they have watched in the theatre.
- Any elite like UP [Union Parishad] member, if present in the session, voluntarily or in response to facilitation share his/her insights and learning from the theatre. This is usually done by combining events presented in theatre with the experiences from the villagers.
- The facilitator requires the audiences to get together at a place next day to hold a community meeting. Facilitator encourages them to think about the existing problems of their village and to figure out how the problems can be resolved/mitigated – issues to be discussed in next day's meeting. Post reactions of the audiences about the play are also recorded.

Community meeting:

As proposed, next day a SDP-initiated community meeting is organized by the villagers. The objective of the meeting is that the villagers will make some concrete plan to improve their condition after being inspired by the theatre they observed. In the case of the theatres organized by the Advocacy Programme three community meetings are held. The first meeting is held following the theatre day, whereas the second and third meetings are held within 7-15 days intervals.



Audio and video materials are both popular and effective tools of communication for rural people. To reinforce the message on migration, educational video/audio shows are played in the community. Live theater shows, live folk song shows and other tested communication activities are implemented through the program to sensitize the community about safe migration.

One study documents the awareness campaigns involving students:¹²

Starting early awareness on safe migration with school children

Migrant workers from Bangladesh are relatively young – more than three quarters belong to the 18 – 35 age group.¹³ Schools are therefore an important starting point for generat-

ing awareness on safe migration practices. The SMBW [Safe Migration for Bangladeshi Workers] project realized this and piloted an innovation in Narsingdi, a district in central Bangladesh, where up to 8 per cent of the population works abroad.

Courtyard sessions were carried out by the project in 164 schools, colleges and madrasas, in collaboration with head teachers, to promote safe migration and remittance management, with the participation of 3,726 students of grade 10. This helped reach aspiring and existing migrants among students' friends and families, and generate awareness. With more community engagement, these children may become the community champions of safe migration, informing others and ultimately, implementing safe migration choices in their own lives.

Other activities like workshops/seminars at different levels are organized to inform, sensitize and activate people in different stratas concerning migration rights. The seminars are held at the national, regional/district, sub-district and union levels attended by representatives of the government and NGOs, professionals, academics, members of civil society, potential migrants, migration victims, media people and other relevant stakeholders.

The program provides pre-decision orientation workshops for potential migrant workers that enable them to analyze social and economic costs and benefits of migration as well as other information needed to make an informed decision. The objective of these orientation workshops is to create awareness among the potential migrant workers on safe labor migration practices using real life stories. Most of the time, these orientation workshops help migrant workers make the decision on migrating abroad in terms of having better preparation and going through the proper process. Many potential migrant workers decide not to go abroad after finding out that it is not profitable at all.

Pre-departure orientation and services

BRAC links those who decide to go abroad after the orientation workshops to pre-employment skill development training for better employment and higher wages in destination countries. The migrant workers and their families are also given orientation, access to information and referrals to affordable financial instruments to help cover the upfront costs of migration, including the provision for training, services, information and hands-on experience for improved management and use of remittance. Therefore, the

main objective of this program is to disseminate in-depth information on how to follow the migration process safely.

The program also offers referral linkages to provide skill enhancement training at the government Technical Training Centers (TTCs) and other private training centers with the goal of making the migrants eligible for better wages as skilled workers.

The BRAC's SMFCs provide migration services to the migrant workers such as pre-departure orientation, visa checking, DEMO registrations, legal aid support, money recovery through arbitration, support to get compensation for accidental death. Pre-training is provided to selected departing migrants who do not have sufficient time to attend the batch of country-specific pre-departure training activities. Through this day-long training, the participants are oriented on the culture, social environment, laws, rules, expected behavior and other realities at the countries of destination which can help the departing migrants handle the new situation confidently.

Departing labor migrant workers receive their visa through various sources, mostly from *dalals*. They face huge difficulty and uncertainty to get their visa check done. Mostly, due to lack of any service provider they migrate without checking their visa. Often times, they fail to work in the country of destination because of fake or wrong visa. Hence, it is important to check the visa before departing to destination countries. The program provides visa check support at the District and Upazila levels to ensure safe migration and protect the migrants from vicious failed migration.

Reintegration awareness and services

The program provides economic reintegration support to the migrant workers through Income Generating Activity (IGA) training, enterprise/new business creation, and training on productive utilization of remittance. The social reintegration support is provided through individual counseling, family counseling, and community awareness campaign to reduce stigma and discrimination. Besides, migrants are referred to various service providers for loan support, legal aid support and medical treatment.

Capacity-building of government, media, partners

BRAC provides training on human rights and migration to government officials (DEMO, BMET), journalists and media personnel. It also

provides coaching support to DEMO officials at district level for migration management.

Policy advocacy and local level advocacy through networking

BRAC implements an advocacy program at the national, regional and local level for the rights of the migrant workers. BRAC advocacy efforts are planned to reduce irregular migration, regulate migration governance and reduce the migrant workers' vulnerability at home and destination.

Migration Program's Approaches

Volunteers

The program has reached over ten million people in Bangladesh. This would not be possible if there were no dedicated volunteer pools. More than a thousand volunteers have been involved in the program. The volunteers spend time spreading useful messages to people in the communities. They have been trained as migration program volunteers.

The program volunteers are involved in carrying out different activities including assisting potential migrant workers in the migration process, assisting migrants in filling up passport form and assisting them in the registration with the DEMO. They support BRAC in facilitating behavior change activities in the community by arranging courtyard meetings, theater and road shows and conducting interpersonal communications (IPC). They disseminate information, education and communication (IEC) and behavior change communications (BCC) materials. They support the program communication workers (CW) and community-based organizations' (CBO) facilitators in holding mass awareness-raising activities in the community. They assist in social arbitration process to recover the money of the deceived migrants. Not only these, they also create database of potential and returnee migrant workers at their respective communities.

The program has developed pools of community-based volunteers by providing capacity development trainings and orientations on safe migration process. BRAC gives priority to returnee migrant workers and their spouses in selecting the volunteers. The volunteers are trained on various issues related to migrant workers' rights and how they can work to assist migrant workers in various stages of migration. They are trained on how to inform people about safe migration choice, what necessary process should

the migrant workers follow and how they can assist the migrant workers in following the process. The volunteers also help the migrant workers in reintegration stages and are trained on various reintegration services. They are also trained on how they can collect information about the returnee migrant workers so that the program can assist the returnee migrant workers. The trained volunteers play a great role in protecting the rights of the migrant workers by informing them about the services that they are entitled to have.

Without the outstanding contribution of the volunteers, the operations of the program could not have been executed smoothly. The volunteers help in reaching out to people in the community. They are well-acquainted with their own localities. They possess a greater knowledge on how to deal with the local people. They identify the migrant workers who need help, making the work of the program much easier. They have the capacity to capture people's attention and make them pay attention to the messages of the program. They promote safe migration and ensure that the idea of safe migration is maintained in the community.



Collective efforts with community-based organizations

The program aims to secure the rights of migrant workers with the participation of the local people. In view of this aim, the program has formed partnership with eighty community-based organizations (CBOS).

These CBOS work to protect the rights of the migrant workers and implement activities in conformity with the demand of the community. BRAC helps in building the capacity of the CBOS at the initial stage. The CBOS subsequently come up with innovative ideas to address the needs of the migrant workers. This grassroots-level work helps people in their decision to work in other countries. The program collaborates with existing CBOS and also facilitates the establishment of new CBOS.

Being local organizations, CBOS can identify the problems of the community members more profoundly. As a result, there is greater acceptance of the CBOS by the people.

The CBOS act as Migration Resource Centers in the community, a reliable source of information needed by potential migrant workers, migrant workers and their family members. The most significant task of the CBOS is to provide timely and accurate information to the migrant workers and their family members. Under the program, CBOS provide monthly, quarterly and annual reports to the respective SMFCs in their areas. They also conduct workshops, arrange for advocacy and awareness-building activities at the district level.

Other than uniting people in the community, the CBOS contribute in protecting the rights of migrant workers and managing different types of services coming from responsible government authorities and service agencies. They can help recover money through social arbitration at the local level.

The CBOS provide services to people in the community by responding to their demand. They can act to secure the dignity of the migrant workers. These organizations can link up the victims seeking services to legal aid authority or any other person/ organization having opportunity to work for the migrant workers. The CBOS can act as key organization at the community level to protect the human rights of the migrant workers and their family members.

Shared responsibilities in protecting the rights of Bangladeshi migrants

There is an urgent need for better policies and practices on protection measures that ensure the well-being and dignity of the Bangladeshi migrant workers and family members. The National Alliance for Migrants' Rights Bangladesh (NAMR, B) is a dynamic national network working for the protection of the rights of migrant workers and their families in Bangladesh. It brings together civil society organizations, community organizations, media organizations and journalists to advocate for the rights of migrant workers in Bangladesh.

NAMR, B started in 2010 with the aim of protecting the rights of migrants and creating a platform for the Bangladeshi civil society organizations to support migrant workers. NAMR, B is working together with existing civil society organizations to advocate nationally, regionally and globally for migrant workers' rights, policies and practices.

In 2014, NAMR, B undertook significant steps for policy advocacy endeavors. In March 2014 the alliance organized a consultation on "Way forward to collective efforts for protecting migrant workers' safety and rights." This consultation focused on media report on the violation of rights, risk and hazards of Bangladeshi migrant workers at the destination countries.

In June 2014, the alliance organized a national level consultation titled "Kafala violating migrant rights: Can FIFA help to abolish?" The consultation advocated for the protection of migrant workers through FIFA since Qatar was selected as the host for FIFA World Cup 2022. Speakers at the consultation advocated for the protection of the migrant workers in the Gulf Cooperation Countries (GCC) through FIFA and other international organizations so that they could force the GCC countries to abolish the maleficent *Kafala* system¹⁴ existing in those countries.

In August 2014 NAMR, B raised voice to demand justice for the victims of the Greece shooting incident. The alliance organized a press conference at the National Press Club titled "Greece verdict should be reviewed." It demanded a commitment from Greece to review the court decision acquitting the Greek farmers of human trafficking.¹⁶ It also demanded that Greece ratify the 1990 Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families.

NAMR, B is planning to set a new advocacy agenda for the next five years. It will focus on skills development and reforming the migrant worker recruitment industry; reintegration of the returnee migrant workers; imple-

mentation of the Overseas Employment and Migrant Act – 2013 and protection of migrant workers' rights. BRAC acts as the secretariat of NAMR,B at present.¹⁵

BRAC's Social Enterprise

BRAC realizes that merely providing information is not enough to make migration safe for the migrant workers. Therefore, BRAC has now launched migration support enterprises in three migrant worker-prone districts where a full 360-degree service - starting from information, language training, and skilling and job placement services - is being provided for a fee. The goal is to reduce the cost and increase the quality of migration.

This migration support enterprise (MSEP) is providing various services. These include visa checking, providing migration information pack, migration counselling, general pre-departure training, country specific pre-departure training, life skills training, trade specific training, direct referrals for overseas job placement, counselling for returnee migrant workers, and entrepreneurship training. These services will enable migrant workers to reduce their dependence on *dalals*, which will result in reducing the number of failed migration, migration cost, harassment and fraud. The MSEP is designed to become a self-sustaining system in the coming years. This sustainable approach will create a lasting source of authentic and timely support service base for the migrant workers and their family members near their locality. The program has also established language and training centers at *upazila* (sub-district) level. These training centers are providing pre-decision orientations, language training, and visa checking and life skills training. They are ensuring the improvement of language and communication skills of the migrant workers, provide basic information and education, and reduce their vulnerability by reducing their dependence on *dalals* and other informal sources.

These service bases are expected to reduce harassment and vulnerabilities, and ensure safe and quality migration by providing authentic, reliable and timely support. This pay-per-service approach will also ensure the continuation of service for protecting the rights of migrant workers.

In areas where MSEP does not exist, the program is implemented. MSEP is an integral part of the program that is launched in areas that are ready for services that can be provided for a minimal fee.

Concluding Remarks

Labor migration is one of the major tools that Bangladesh employs to eliminate poverty. But the ill motives of some people turned labor migration into a risky enterprise. It is essential that the Bangladeshi migrant workers are provided a comprehensive package of information and services that is needed before leaving Bangladesh and useful while working in their country of destination. The migration program of BRAC plays a crucial role as a lighthouse for the migrant workers toward a safe and secure migration journey.

Endnotes

1 Bangladesh: Some Selected Statistics, Appendix 3, Annual Report 2016-2017, Bangladesh Bank, page 267, www.bb.org.bd/pub/annual/anreport/ar1617/appo3.pdf.

2 One report states: "The average value for Bangladesh during that period was 3726.55 million U.S. dollars with a minimum of 18.76 million U.S. dollars in 1976 and a maximum of 15366.72 million U.S. dollars in 2015." See Bangladesh: Remittances as percent of GDP, TheGlobalEconomy.com, www.theglobaleconomy.com/Bangladesh/remittances_percent_GDP/.

3 Demographic dividend, United Nations Population Fund, www.unfpa.org/demographic-dividend.

4 Cited by Abdullah Al Mahmud Shohag, "Demographic dividend: Reality and possibility for Bangladesh," *The Independent*, 22 August 2015, www.theindependent-bd.com/printversion/details/12596.

5 See Mustafizur Rahman, *Advancing the Interests of Bangladesh's Migrant Workers. Issues of Financial Inclusion and Social Protection*, October 2015, <http://cpd.org.bd/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Safeguarding-Interests-of-Bangladesh-Migrant-Workers-Issues-of-Financial-Inclusion-and-Social-Protection.pdf>.

6 Aneeka Rahman, *An Innovative Approach to Promoting Safe Migration: Three Lessons Learned from Bangladesh*, *End Poverty in South Asia*, The World Bank, 30 July 2017, <http://blogs.worldbank.org/endpovertyinsouthasia/innovative-approach-promoting-safe-migration-three-lessons-learned-bangladesh>.

7 International Labour Organization (International Institute for Labour Studies), *Bangladesh Seeking Better Employment Conditions for Better Socioeconomic Outcomes*, 2013, www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_229105.pdf.

8 Soft skill: Life skill, pre-departure skill, language skill

9 Hard skill: Trade-based skill.

10 Mohammad Rafi Hasanur Rahman, "Popular Theatre and BRAC," Research Monograph Series No. 40, August 2009, BRAC, page 6, http://research.brac.net/monographs/monograph_40.pdf.

11 Ibid, Rahman, pages 8 - 9.

12 BRAC/World Bank, Promoting safe migration through innovation, December 2016, www.brac.net/sites/default/files/portals/Safe_Migration_through_Innovation_December_2016.pdf.

13 Note 11 of the study: “The Homecoming – Profiling the returning migrant workers of Bangladesh, ILO, MoEWOE.”

14 Under the *Kafala* system a migrant worker’s immigration status is legally bound to an individual employer or sponsor (*kafeel*) for their contract period. The migrant worker cannot enter the country, transfer employment nor leave the country for any reason without first obtaining explicit written permission from the *kafeel*. The worker must be sponsored by a *kafeel* in order to enter the destination country and remains tied to this *kafeel* throughout their stay. The *kafeel* must report to the immigration authorities if the migrant worker leaves their employment and must ensure the worker leaves the country after the contract ends, including paying for the flight home. Often the *kafeel* exerts further control over the migrant worker by confiscating their passport and travel documents, despite legislation in some destination countries that declares this practice illegal.” Migrant Forum Asia, Policy Brief No. 2: REFORM OF THE KAFALA (SPONSORSHIP) SYSTEM, www.ilo.org/dyn/migpractice/docs/132/PB2.pdf.

15 Visit NAMR,B website for more information: <http://namrb.net/>.

16 Forty-two Bangladeshi workers filed an application with the European Court of Human Rights (Chowdury and Others v. Greece [application no. 21884/15]) against the Greek government for failing to protect them from human trafficking. The court ruled that the “Bangladeshis were subjected to forced labour and did not receive effective protection from the Greek State” which violated the European Convention on Human Rights provision on “prohibition of forced labour” (Article 4 §2). The workers were also awarded compensation ranging from 12,000 to 16,000 Euro each. See “Greece: Human rights court awards €576,000 to forced labour migrant strawberry-pickers,” European Convention of Human Rights, 30 March 2017, www.humanrightseurope.org/2017/03/greece-forced-labour-undocumented-migrant-strawberry-pickers-win-human-rights-complaint/.

