

National Consultation on the Global Forum on Migration and Development 2009
CIRDAP Auditorium, Dhaka, Bangladesh
19-20 August 2009

Migrant Forum in Asia together with its members in Bangladesh, the Refugee and Migratory Movement Research Unit (RMMRU), Welfare Association for the Rights of Bangladeshi Emigrants Development Foundation (WARBE-DF), Association for Community Development (ACD), Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK) organized a national consultation on the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) on 19-20 August 2009 in Dhaka, Bangladesh. More than 80 participants from civil society organizations, migrants' grassroots organizations, trade unions, recruitment agencies, government ministries, the academe and the media participated in the consultation.

The consultation aimed to bring together key migration and development organizations, NGOs, networks, advocates and civil society groups along with relevant government officials and private sector representatives who have demonstrated strong corporate responsibility practices at the country level, throughout the Asian region, to coordinate and jointly strategize efforts relating to the 3rd GFMD in Athens, Greece on 2-5 November 2009. It also aimed to strengthen advocacy around country-specific migrant policy initiatives, such as the ratification and implementation into national law of the 1990 UN Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers and Members of their families (UN 1990 MWC).

Foreign Minister, Dr. Dipu Moni was the keynote speaker for the two day consultation. In her speech, Dr. Moni emphasized on strengthening legal channels for migration and protecting the rights of migrant workers. She said that migrants contribute to the economies of the both countries of origin and destination. She further added that global economic crisis is a matter of serious concern for labour sending countries which depends on migrant remittances to sustain the economy. The deployment of migrants from Bangladesh decreased due to the economic crisis and partial ban from countries in the Middle East. She also said that the Bangladesh government is actively considering the ratification of the UN 1990 MWC.

The consultation was divided into five (5) working sessions:

1. Making the Migration-Development Nexus work for the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs)
2. Policy and Institutional Coherence and Partnerships
3. Advantages of Ratifying the UN 1990 MWC
4. Migrant Integration, Reintegration and Circulation for Development
5. Good Governance and Recruitment of Labour

The first working session discussed "Making the Migration-Development Nexus work for the MDGs" and the speaker was Dr. Tasneem Siddique of the Univeristy of Dhaka and RMMRU. Dr. Siddique is among the writers for the session papers on MDG for the official GFMD CSO days in Athens, Greece. Dr. Anwar Begum of the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) was the discussion for the session. Dr. Siddique discussed the interface of MDGs and migration and emphasized that policy level change at state level is necessary to achieve the MDGs.

The second working session discussed "Policy and Institutional Coherence and Partnerships" and the speaker was Mr. Rasheed Al Hasan of INAFI Bangladesh. Discussants in the session included: Mr. Shulam Mustaf of the Bangladesh Association of International Recruitment Agencies (BAIRA) and Mr. Syed Saiful Haque of WARBE DF. The session recommended for

stronger cooperation among various government agencies dealing with migration as well as for strengthened cooperation between government ministries and civil society.

The third working session discussed Advantages of Ratifying the UN 1990 MWC and the speaker was Prof Asif Nazrul of the University of Dhaka law center. Discussants from the session included: Ms. Shaheen Anam of the Manusher Juno Foundation and Justice Dr. Sayeed Rafaat Ahmed of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh. The sessions discussed how Bangladesh would benefit from ratifying the UN 1990 MWC. The speakers and discussants all emphasized that ratification is only one step. There is still a need to look into the implementation of the convention to national law as well as monitor the country's compliance to the convention. Representatives of government ministries present at the consultation expressed strong support for the ratification of the UN 1990 MWC.

The fourth working session discussed migrant integration, reintegration and circulation for development and the speaker for the session was Dr. Rozana Rashid of the RMMRU. Discussants included Dr. Nurul Islam, Director of the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET) and the Mr. Kazi Abul Kalam, Deputy Secretary of the Ministry of Expatriates Welfare and Overseas Employment. During the session it was emphasized that migration as means to support the country's economic development is not sustainable. There is a need to prepare migrants for return and reintegration; planning for reintegration starts prior to the migrants' departure. The lack of programs and support from the government for reintegration was also pointed out by the participants. MFA member, WARBE DF shared on their initiatives concerning reintegration through MFA's Migrant Savings for Alternative Investment (MSAI).

The fifth working session was on "Good Governance and Recruitment of Labour" and speaker for the session was Ms. Tatcee Macabuag of the MFA Secretariat. Discussants included Mr. Ghulam Mustafa of BAIRA and Kazi Abul Kalam of the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET). The discussion focused on the responsibilities of recruitment agencies as well as the need for stricter regulations in relation to intermediaries.

In the concluding session a summary of the recommendations was presented by Dr. Chowdhury Abrar of the RMMRU. The participants at the consultation urged for the immediate ratification of the 1990 UN Convention on Migrant Workers. They also wanted substantial increase in budgetary allocation for better governance of the migration sector. The need for inter-ministerial coordination and partnership of all stake holders such as government, civil society and the private sector were also highlighted. The participants felt that mechanisms should be in place for collection and updating of data on migration. There was a general consensus that the issue of return and reintegration of labour migrants was the most neglected area in policy agenda. The speakers urged for framing of appropriate policies and programmes so that returnee migrants can access information about investment, bank credit, training in skills and financial management.

In his closing remarks, Mr. Mohamed Mijarul Quayes, the Foreign Secretary, stated we have to take "pro-migrant approach to dismantle anti-migrant fortresses". He also said that there is a major gap in international protection regime for migrant workers though they contribute to socio-economic development of countries of destination and origin.