



From Risks to Rights:
Evaluation of a Training
Programme for Women
Aspiring to Migrate for Work



LONDON

&
MEDICINE

Content

Acknowledgements	2
Acronyms	5
Abstract	6
Introduction	7
1. WiF project: overall structure and purpose	7
2. Bangladesh community-based programme	8
2.1 Set up	8
2.2 Training modules	8
2.3 Messages delivered in three steps	8
3. Research	9
3.1 Research team and calendar	9
3.2 Research methods	9
3.3 Site selection	9
3.4 The cohorts of informants	10
3.5 Research process	11
3.6 Interviews with journalists	12
4. The Bangladesh context at the time of the research	12
Research findings	16
5. Demographics of women in the cohort	16
5.1 Age	16
5.2 Education	17
5.3 Marital status	17
5.4 Age at first marriage	17
5.5 Occupations	18
5.6 Extent of participation in the WiF programme	18
5.7 Labour migration	19
6. Training venues, message content and delivery modes	20
6.1 Venues and setups	20
6.2 Language and cultural translations	20
6.3 Depicting a migrant woman	21
6.4 Words that heal	21
6.5 Goal setting	22
6.6 Adjusting to life abroad	22

6.7	Risks of migration and how to minimise them	22
6.8	The value of women's work	23
6.9	Budgeting	24
6.10	Alternative livelihood options	24
6.11	Health and personal hygiene	25
7.	Critical assessment of the WiF messages	26
7.1	Assessment at a glance	26
7.2	Attractive propositions, in ated promises and pressure to meet targets:	26
7.3	“All women are potential migrant workers”: a problematic theory	27
7.4	Participants' expectations frustrated	28
7.5	Women labour migration promoted	29
7.6	Messages useful here but dangerous to apply abroad	30
7.7	“This kind of talk is not for us”	31
7.8	On the notion of rights	32
8.	'Failed' migration: Three case histories	33
8.1	Case one: Shikha	33
8.2	Case two: Lily	36
8.3	Case three: Lotika	38
8.4	On research methods	39
9.	Cohort two: husbands and family members	40
9.1	Interviews with husbands	41
9.2	Interviews with mothers and daughters	49
10.	Cohort three: managers, trainers and eldworkers	51
10.1	Recruitment procedures	51
10.2	Salary and working conditions	53
10.3	The tasks of eldworkers	53
10.4	Trainers and project manager	54
10.5	Limited training and inadequate knowledge about women labour migration	55
10.6	Questioning the promises of the NGO	56
11.	Conclusion	58
12.	Recommendations	60
	Lexicon	61

Acronyms

AIDS	Acquired Immune De ciency Syndrome
BMET	Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training
CARAM ASIA	Coordination of Action Research on AIDS and Mobility, Asia
CEDAW	United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
DFID	Department for International Development
DRC	Drishti Research Centre
GAATW	Global Alliance Against Traf c in Women
HIV	Human Immunode ciency Virus
ILO	International Labour Organization
IO	Implementing Organization
KSA	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
LSHTM	London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine
MFA	Migrant Forum Asia
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGO	Non-Government Organization
PI	Principal Investigator
PKB	Probashi K ollan Bank
SANEM	South Asian Network on Economic Modeling
SWiFT	South Asia Work in Freedom Transnational Evaluation
WiF	Work in Freedom
WHO	World Health Organization

Jordan remained important for garment factory workers, but had reduced as a destination for domestic workers. Nonetheless, WiF remaining active in both the source and recipient countries was beneficial for the research even when these no longer corresponded to the same sets of migrants. It contributed to broaden the perspective and attention could be given to what accounts for changes in migration routes and differences and commonalities in destination countries, for example in the application of the *kefala*² system.

2. Bangladesh community-based programme

2.1 SET UP

In Bangladesh, ILO first conducted pilot projects with several NGOs to test the WiF concept and then selected three of them to implement the community-based programme. One was assigned for research and evaluation, and we refer to it as the NGO or Implementing Organisation (IO). This NGO conducted the WiF programme in Narayanganj district, covering 10 unions and employing one fieldworker for each union. Our focus here is on the implementation of the WiF programme and other activities of the NGO were considered only when they were offered to participants as part of a package of available services – such as the use of a helpline for migrant women. The community programme ran for 11 months from April 2015 to March 2016. A second phase began in June 2016 was not part of this investigation.

2.2 TRAINING MODULES

The NGO prepared training modules with inputs from regional partners, namely Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW) and Migrant Forum Asia (MFA). GAATW inspired a “feminist participatory methodology” and proposed a health approach ensuring that “women have a better understanding of their bodies and some skills to look after themselves.” MFA conducted an overall review of the communication material.³

The pre-decision orientation presented the following topics over two days:

Day One:

- Goal setting
- Knowledge about migration and criteria to migrate legally
- Decision making; adjusting to life abroad
- Jobs, destinations and costs
- Risks of migration and how to minimise them; existing laws and ‘safe migration’

Day Two:

- Gender roles; women’s rights as workers
- Family budget and proper utilisation of remittances
- Alternative livelihoods and job opportunities in Bangladesh
- Women’s health, HIV and AIDS

2.3 MESSAGES DELIVERED IN THREE STEPS

1. Fieldworkers reach out to women who are at home during the day, and conduct doorstep and courtyard meetings. They explain conditions to ensure ‘safe migration’ and describe the services the NGO offers to migration candidates. Those interested in hearing more are invited to attend the pre-decision orientation. The names and phone numbers of these ‘candidates’ are collected so they could be informed later of the date and the venue of the training session.
2. Pre-decision orientation sessions are held on two non-consecutive days at a local venue that fieldworkers organise. Venues have to be made available free of cost.
3. Pre-departure training is offered to a smaller number of women at a more distant location, with live-in accommodation for five days.

The programme employs three trainers who conduct both the pre-decision orientation and the pre-departure training following the same modules. The research team observed doorstep and courtyard meetings and participated in several pre-decision orientation sessions, but did not attend the 5-day pre-departure training.

2. The *kefala* is a sponsorship system prevailing in all countries of the Middle East with minor differences. Migrant workers get their working visa through a private citizen, a company or the government of the recipient country who thus become their *kofeel*. Should a worker find his/her working conditions unacceptable, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to leave the *kofeel* without becoming

undocumented or illegal in the destination country. The *kefela* system imposes many restrictions on migrant workers while being a source of power (and in some cases an important source of income) for sponsoring agents.

3. *Community Empowerment Report, Work in Freedom Bangladesh*, ILO, 6 February 2015.

3. Research

3.1 RESEARCHTEAM AND CALENDAR

Four researchers – three women and one man – conducted the fieldwork and interviewed four cohorts of informants in Bangla. All are members of the Drishti Research Centre, a Dhaka-based study group that conducted several anthropological studies focusing more specifically on women's cross border labour migration from 2001 onwards. The research team was therefore familiar with the topic and also had some knowledge of the area.

The research spread over 18 months beginning in October 2015. Field research overlapped with the WiF community programme for 5 months. As the second round of interviews were conducted, the WiF programme was closing down. At the third and fourth rounds, fieldworkers were no longer employed. They were unavailable for information or for services, even if they resided in the same locality. Fieldworkers were uncertain about their future for over two months and, when re-appointed, many were sent to new locations. Women 'candidates for migration' no longer expected assistance. Some wondered why researchers were still coming to them.

Sister, you keep coming to me. I like speaking to you, but could you not do anything for us? I went to the [NGO] training hoping I would get a visa and they would help me to migrate but got nothing [the NGO] needed us. That is why they came to us. Now they are finished with us. We do not see them anymore. They are not trying to find out how we are doing.

Projects have limited duration and this one was short given its considerable ambitions. So what did participants retain from the WiF messages? The last interviews give some indications of the lasting effects of a 2-day orientation and a 5-day training. We saw that some women continued to declare having benefited, while others denied having learned anything useful. Months after the training ended, the research continued to focus on women's lives and their migration plan or any other alternatives they may be pursuing. For those hoping to migrate, convincing a reticent husband, finding someone to take over family responsibilities or re-assuring their entourage that honour and reputation would be safeguarded are all questions for which women had to find their own solutions.

3.2 RESEARCH METHODS

The original evaluation plan comprised interviews with three cohorts: 30 women who followed the training and one of their family members, interviewed over 3 rounds at 3 months intervals, and 10 NGO staff interviewed in 2 rounds. The research was structured, and costs were calculated based on these 200 interviews. We actually considerably expanded upon the original research base. The first cohort was increased to 40 women. Attrition was negligible and only one woman became untraceable after the first round. Women who migrated were followed through family members, and in one case by direct phone conversations.

In the second round of interviews, the research included women who migrated but cut their stay abroad short when they could not cope with the demands of the employer or for other reasons resulting in a 'failed' migration – which will be made more explicit later in this report with case histories. At this stage, let it only be said that a woman's 'successful' migration is expected to fulfil two conditions: earning reasonably well and safeguarding one's reputation. Women who earn (too) much and (too) quickly are suspected of immoral conduct (which is not the case for men). Some women had attended the WiF training, others had not. In line with the evaluative purpose of the research, women who have not been exposed to the WiF messages are considered separately. The addition of these returnees considerably deepens our understanding as it permits to assess the usefulness and relevance of the WiF training in relation to the very real problems women encounter abroad.

The WiF project focuses on two occupations: paid domestic work and garment factory work. In two of the three study sites, girls and women are recruited for other occupations as well. Considering the overall purpose of the WiF project, which is to prevent labour trafficking, these occupations cannot be ignored. The research investigated the case histories of five young women and adolescent girls planning to migrate, or having migrated, with short-term tourist visas to work in dance bars in Dubai. They or their mothers attended the WiF training.

3.3 SITE SELECTION

Three sites were selected for the research. The purpose was to identify communities that were more or less familiar with and tolerant of women who cross borders for work. Even though the WiF

trainers proclaimed that ‘all women are potential migrant workers’, this is not a view shared in Bangladesh society, nor it is a reality observed on the ground. Degrees of tolerance towards female migration vary considerably between and within communities and marked geographical disparities exist in this regard.⁴ For example, Narayangonj district itself is not representative of Bangladesh as a whole. It contains pockets from where women have been known to migrate at a time when such movement was not only illegal but unheard of in other parts of the country. This patchwork landscape was kept in mind and sites were selected to reflect diversity. They include:

1. A rural union where agriculture is the main activity. Women are less engaged in wage work, but this is changing as a large industrial complex started recruiting women. Most of the inhabitants live in their ancestral home. One also finds a displaced population coming from villages that have been claimed for urban development. In these more traditional communities, female migration remains low and is often frowned upon.
2. A resettlement colony established in 1975 for Dhaka slum dwellers. Families originate from different districts and share a past history of extreme poverty and displacement. Young women and adolescent girls found employment in the garment industry and other factories that opened in the 1990s, which resulted in better living conditions. Today, the place is no longer considered a slum – it forms a loosely knit community with relatively weak social control⁵ and constitutes a major pool for the recruitment of migrant women. It will be referred to in this report as Balupara, a fictive name.
3. A densely populated semi-urban area on the outskirts of Narayangonj, a major industrial and commercial centre. Cheap housing and availability of work nearby attracted migrants from other districts. This is one of the first locations from where Bangladeshi women migrated abroad.

3.4 THE COHORTS OF INFORMANTS

The first cohort women were selected according to two criteria: (1) preparing to migrate or seriously considering doing so and (2) participation in WiF

4. See Blanchet, T. Razzaque, A. and Biswas, H, *Documenting the Undocumented: Female Migrant Workers from Bangladesh*, Pathak Shamabesh, Dhaka, 2008.

5. Another way to speak of weak social control is to say that Balupara is a society without *samaj*. It is said that women in particular have no modesty and are (too) free. There are many

pre-decision orientation and/or pre-departure training. Women drawn to the training for other reasons – and they were many – were not selected. The reality on the ground proved complicated, however. In two cases, the family and local recruiting agents, commonly called *dalals*, forbade the women who had enlisted to attend the training, and one woman had to catch her flight early. These women only heard WiF’s messages from the fieldworker at their doorstep. Other women declared attending the training (and were officially counted as such) but admitted coming only to sign that they had been present and collect the lunch box. Such ‘light’ participation was uncovered in the course of the evaluation.

The second cohort consisted of the family members of the women participating in the first cohort. More than one person was often included here in order to provide useful and often necessary information, crosscheck facts, or document complex family histories. The third cohort was composed of fieldworkers, trainers and management staff of the implementing agency and the fourth cohort consisted of the *dalals*. The number of rounds of interviews was also increased for cohort one and two. Tables 1 and 2 detail the number of informants and interviews conducted.

TABLE 1: PERSONS FOLLOWED PER COHORT AND PER ROUND

Cohort	Number of persons followed				Total
	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4	
One	40	44 (39+5)*	48 (44+4)	14	49
Two	34	46 (32+14)	45 (36+9)	14	57
Three	10	11 (9+2)	–	–	12
Four	3	6 (1+5)	6 (3+3)	–	11
Total	87	103	97	28	129

Cohort one = potential migrants and returnee migrants

Cohort two = husband and other family members

Cohort three = IO staff

Cohort four = *dalal*/intermediaries

* From previous round + new interviewees

households without ‘real’ men. The social mechanisms orienting and controlling behaviour in a (normal) *samaj* here do not operate, say its critiques, comparing Balupara with an idealised society elsewhere. Not everyone agrees on the low ranking of Balupara. Many inhabitants are proud to declare that it is no longer a slum and attribute achievements to women’s hard work.

TABLE 2: INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED PER COHORT AND PER ROUND

Cohort	Total number of interviews				Total
	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4	
One	40	44	48	14	146
Two	34	46	45	14	139
Three	10	11	–	–	21
Four	3	6	6	–	15
Total	87	107	99	28	321

A checklist of questions was prepared before each round of interviews permitting minimum coherence and collection of standard data. Interviews were not limited to these points and women were invited to narrate events or particular situations that made them want to migrate and/or interfered with this ambition. Each new interview at roughly 3 months intervals brought new elements and the situation was never the same. Relationship with the researchers also took new turns. Beside these regular interviews, attention was given to unsolicited conversations or events unfolding in the community – such as the early and unexpected return of a migrant woman. A tape recorder was used in some cases, but many interviews were written up from jotted notes and from memory. There is no room here to discuss the respective merits of these methods, but both served our purpose with sufficiently good results. The narratives were translated from Bangla to English by the chief researcher who reviewed each encounter with the field investigator, taking note of the circumstances, duration of the meeting, location, individuals present, what was said (and not said), the tone, emotions, body language, etc. Links were drawn, and a preliminary interpretation suggested.

FIGURE 1: WOMEN LABOUR MIGRATION

Figure 2 compares male and female migration trends. One notes the ups and downs of male migratory flows, which have been seriously affected by the economic crisis of 2008-2009 and the collapse in the price of petrol that hit major destination countries in the Middle East a few years later. Women labour migration, though much lower than men, shows a regular and steady growth.

The sharp reduction in male migration did not immediately translate into a drop of remittances, which came later. The level of remittances dropped from 2015 onward despite an increase in the number of migrants (see Figure 3). The promotion of women labour migration undoubtedly relates to a concern with maintaining remittance levels on which the Bangladesh economy is strongly dependant.

than the cost of female migration, a situation that further exacerbates gender differences in cross border mobility without contributing to the protection of women workers' rights. The table below shows the impact of the MoU on migration trends. In 2014, prior to this accord, the number of women labour migrants was insignificant. In 2015, there was an increase but well below target. For the next two years, there was a regular upward trend in women's migration, but the most spectacular increase was in men's migration. Between 2016 and 2017, numbers increase more than six fold, representing a very profitable business for recruiting agencies (see Table 3).

Table 4 illustrates the growing importance of Saudi Arabia and the sharp drop of

Lebanon as destination country for women migrants. The sites of our research more or less follow this national trend.

Taking into account the differing national contexts within which the WiF regional project unfolds is important. How can such national factors not percolate into the project? While the Nepal government imposes a ban on women's



5. Demographics of women in the cohort

The data below gives the demographic information of 49 women consisting of the cohort of 40 women interviewed from the first round, plus 9 women included in subsequent rounds.

5.1 AGE

Ages of the women ranged from 17 to 55. The Bangladesh government authorises the migration of women for domestic work between the age of 25 and 45. By these guidelines, some women are either too young or too old to migrate, but there were good reasons to include them in the cohort.

TABLE 5: COHORT ONE: AGE BY SITE

Age	Site 1	Site 2	Site 3	Total (%)
Below 20		1	1	2 (4.1)
20–24	1	2	1	4 (8.2)
25–29	4	5	3	12 (24.5)
30–34	3	5	7	15 (30.6)
35–39	1	4	1	6 (12.3)
40–44	1	3		4 (8.2)
45–49		2	2	4 (8.2)
50+	2			2 (4.1)
Total	12	22	15	49 (100.0)

Fieldworkers welcomed younger participants to the training – often students in their teens – probably not realising how quickly some of these girls would effectively migrate. For example, Poppy¹¹ was 18 years old when she attended the pre-decision orientation and pre-departure training. She left for Dubai a few weeks later with a tourist visa to work as a dance bar worker, as several of her friends did before her.¹²

I have been dreaming about migration. Many of my friends left already. When [the elderworker] told me about the training, I went dancing all the way. I happily attended the 7 days. I took everything in, writing all information in a notebook. I know I am too young to go abroad. At the training, this was made very clear. Women must be 25 years old Friends my age have passport made showing they are older. I already declared that I was older when I filled up the form for my passport.

Fieldworkers also invite women above the age of 45 in the hope that they would influence younger women to attend. Many were ex-migrants and a few engaged in recruitment, as *dala*. Some intended to migrate again hoping to ‘*x*’ their age, though this is not always successful.

My passport says I am 50 years old but in fact I am a bit older I do not think a woman my age cannot work abroad At the [NGO] training, you say that migrant women should be between 25 and 45 years old. Yet, I have seen that you include women who are much older. I did the two-day and the five-day training. I can tell you, there were few young women there. Most women were about my age (Asia).

11. For the sake of confidentiality, the names of persons in this report are fictive.

12. Informed by the researcher, the elder worker was astonished to hear of Poppy’s departure – she knew her personally. She also discovered that there were occupations others than those mentioned in the WiF training.

Asia never managed to 'x' her age as she learned that a birth date inscribed in a digital passport cannot be altered. As a result, she had to abandon the idea of migrating altogether. On the other hand, Rohima, another cohort woman in her

5.7 LABOUR MIGRATION

Prior to round one, 15 out of 40 women had experienced migration. By the study end, 23 of the original cohort had experienced migration. That the sample comprised such a high proportion of women who migrated before is an interesting finding, as this was not part of the selection criteria. On completion of round three, 28 out of 49 women (57 per cent) experienced cross border labour migration with various outcomes: 11 women 'failed' migration and 4 were unsatisfied with the benefits though they had not totally failed. A 'failed' migration often leads to more migration until hopefully, success is achieved. Having paid the price in terms of both monetary loss and reputational damage, women often keep on trying until monetary benefits are reaped. Such logic will be exemplified later through case histories.

TABLE 11: NUMBER 521C (UM)Tj /Span<</Actu3 Tm [(ypcypo)Tj /Spa 42.05 g5t8 /Span<</ActualText<MESUM

Parul returned within 2 months. Nonetheless, the words that helped a wounded woman to feel

agency. Even though the stories paint a damning picture of local power holders, exposes connivance between migration brokers and local government representatives, and mentions multiple villains across borders, the local *dalals* that the women contacted alone are made out to be the culprits. This prepares the conclusion. Thus, foremost amongst advice given to ensure 'safe migration' is to avoid *dalals* (which participants do not accept).

Participants are later informed of the laws enacted to protect migrant workers, including the '*Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking 2012*' and the '*Overseas Employment and Migration Act*

When the baskets I weave are sold, my husband regards the income as his. Although he entrusts me with the money, he checks the accounts. When I worked at the factory, my salary was mine and everybody recognized this. Working with my husband is not a problem and we can make ends meet. But I lost the independence I had. When I worked at the factory, I could spend I did not have to ask my husband. Now, I must ask and whether he agrees or not I feel hesitant. This is my husband's money (Rozina)

Rozina migrated to Saudi Arabia in February 2016, mainly to escape a violent marriage. Three months after her departure, her husband had not received any money and was furious. One researcher spoke to Rozina on the phone and found she had sent money to her father first. Her job was demanding, but freedom in dispensing her income as she wanted gave her a sense of control she enjoyed. A desire for individual recognition and some control

was needed, would migration be the best way to obtain the money? The discussion could have taken another turn, but this was not the purpose. Pakhi's story was meant to introduce – and inadvertently promote – women's labour migration. The WiF training did not seriously consider other livelihood options which are given only a 'light' treatment.

6.11 HEALTH AND PERSONAL HYGIENE

The module on health and personal hygiene demonstrated innovative methods, starting with a lesson on female anatomy. Any man present in the room was asked to leave, after which the trainer or the elderworker put on a long apron depicting the position of female organs: vagina, uterus, ovaries, etc. In simple and even poetic language, the trainer talks about sexual desire, intercourse, menses, and pregnancy. Women listen attentively, but a few women later admitted feeling shame and embarrassment.

I particularly liked the health section, but I also felt embarrassed. It was shameful to me when they talked about prolapse of the uterus and demonstrated with practical exercises how one should contract muscles down there. Many were laughing out of embarrassment. Also, they used English words I did not understand.

I regret my participation to the [NGO] training as it revealed what should have remained secret.

The presentation demystified the female body and gave useful information that participants generally appreciated.

The part of the training I found very useful was on health. I could understand better why I suffered the condition I did abroad. One cannot tell these things in public.

All this information on health is good to know whether one migrates or not.

As mentioned earlier, messages about menstrual hygiene confounded participants. Women were told that for hygienic reasons they should use Senora (a brand of sanitary pad) for no more than 6 hours or else it could cause infection. Women are familiar with the brand name – advertised on television – but the great majority never use the product as it is too costly. Alternatively, they were

then told that new cloth can be set aside for the purpose, washed carefully after use and dried in the sun. In the crowded and shaded settlements where these instructions were given, where was the sun, and how could such cloth be exposed in full view? This instruction was also followed by a description of the symptoms of common vaginal infections and various home recipes for treatment were given. Douches with an infusion of tea leaves, *neem* leaves or other concoctions were suggested. However, even if such ingredients could be procured, women lack the bathroom and privacy to apply these lessons. Innovative as they were, these messages were inappropriate considering the average living conditions in a village. The risks of contracting HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases and protections available were also covered using official WHO language. This was too much for some of the participants, as HIV and AIDS is a frightening subject.

AIDS, we don't want to hear this word and it should not be pronounced in front of young women hoping to migrate either. They will be frightened and no one will want to go abroad. Knowing what I know, I will not send my daughter abroad.

Women returning sick after spending years abroad is a known occurrence in sites of high migration. The suspicion is strong that they have contracted 'the deadly diseases' even though the word AIDS is never uttered. Such outcome not only nullifies all the gains of migration but also brings moral condemnation and social rejection.

Amena spent over 20 years in Bahrain. She was divorced and had no children so she was very generous helping brothers and sisters. But she caught a bad disease abroad, she came home and she died within 3 months. Everybody said bad things about her implying that she had engaged in a sinful life, which caused her untimely death. Look, if I had stayed longer myself in the job that I landed in Dubai, I could have finished like her and this would not have been a successful migration. (Asha)

Engaged in sex work for two years in Dubai where she caught a sexually transmitted infection that made the work painful, Asha found the module on health particularly useful. However, she still did not want to hear about HIV.

Contraception is another delicate issue and experienced migrants felt the topic was inappropriately treated.

At the training, they talked about human rights. But instead, they should say, take precautions before going abroad and make sure that you don't fall into trouble by getting pregnant. Could they not have spoken about this?

How should one explain to women leaving with domestic visas the need to use contraceptives? Is it not suggesting risks that should not be talked about? A three-month contraceptive injection was reportedly administered to all migrant women undergoing government training. But for experienced migrants, this is insufficient and women should leave with longer-term protection.

7. Critical assessment of the WiF messages

7.1 ASSESSMENT AT A GLANCE

The table below presents an overview of the women's assessment of the WiF messages, based on statements made in three rounds of interviews. Half of the women made positive comments while a substantial number (40.8 per cent) expressed the view that the training did not fulfil their expectations. One fifth were highly critical and said they were misguided and faced problems that they attributed to deceptive messages.

TABLE 14: COHORT WOMEN'S ASSESSMENT OF WiF TRAINING AT A GLANCE

	Number	%
Enhanced confidence and removed fear about migration	23	46.9
Learned about our rights	13	26.5
Did not fulfil expectations	20	40.8
Were misguided with these messages	11	20.4
Helpful to some extent	2	4.1
Information missing	1	2.0

Source: WiF Study 2015–17. Multiple answers recorded from 49 case studies.

Before discussing these responses, it is useful to look at participants' expectations, what they hoped to gain and how the WiF training was presented to them.

7.2 ATTRACTIVE PROPOSITIONS, INFLATED PROMISES AND PRESSURE TO MEET TARGETS

In order to convince women to enrol in the training, fieldworkers multiplied attractive propositions. Women will know what needs to be done to ensure 'safe migration'; they were eligible for a loan from the Probashi Kalyan Bank to cover the costs of migration; they would have access to a dedicated helpline should they face problems abroad, etc. These promises created expectations, but a good number of women considered that they were not delivered, resulting in the recorded disappointment. In the end, no participants obtained bank loans, and women who faced a crisis abroad did not receive assistance from the NGO helpline, nor were they helped by the Bangladesh embassy for that matter.

Sister [the fieldworker] told me that [the NGO] offered training to women intending to go abroad and provided them with assistance. She said after taking the training, a woman could cope with problems abroad. If she has [the NGO] seal on her documents, she will get help and she will be successful. She will get good work and good income. I never thought of going abroad before listening to Sister. But after hearing her, I began dreaming about migration (Lovely).

The fieldworkers were under pressure to ensure that at least 30 women attend each pre-decision orientation session. Hence, they oversold promises to achieve their target. The NGO signed a contract with ILO to train 3,000 women 'candidates for migration' in 100 batches within a limited period of time. Mathematically, this required 30 participants per batch, a standard uniformly applied in all sites. ILO put pressure on the NGO management, which was passed on to fieldworkers. Meeting these quantitative targets ended up as a measurement of their performance. Fieldworkers admitted this requirement was a tremendous challenge. Motivating women to attend, reminding those enlisted to come and making sure that they actually turn up is hard work, so strong arguments were needed. When an insufficient number of women showed interest, or when some of those enlisted failed to turn up, fieldworkers lled in places with whoever was available and could afford the time. At one pre-decision orientation in Volta, a village characterised by low female migration, the research team found, out of 32 participants, 8 students aged between 13 and 19 and several wives of migrant men. These persons did not intend to migrate – and clearly said so. The trainer told them

to listen nonetheless and share the WiF messages with their entourage. With a multiplier effect of 4, messages addressed to 32 participants were thus calculated to reach 128 persons, a number duly inscribed on the report sheet. How 'safe migration' messages percolate or spread horizontally is not checked – the metrics are purely mathematical.

The challenge of recruiting 'potential migrant women' to the WiF sessions was not the same in all sites. Where women labour migration is a well-entrenched practice, it was easier to get women interested, but in areas where such movement is not only uncommon but frowned upon – such as the rural site in this research – the *eldworker* had a hard time finding participants.

The eldworker is my niece. She came to me as she wanted to identify women who could be enrolled in the NGO training. All I could do is send her 4 women. There are so few women interested in migration here. She has difficulty in meeting her target. I cannot help much. (Khaled dalal)

Khaled sends men abroad. His three sons work in Gulf countries but he would never dream of sending his daughters abroad, or any woman for that matter, as he considers this immoral. Nonetheless, he genuinely tried to help his niece. Participants also enrolled in the training out of sympathy for the *eldworker*.

M. is a nice girl. She had a hard life and her mother just died. I feel sympathy for her. I am not interested in migration but I came to save her job.

As mentioned earlier, five of the women admitted having no interest in the WiF messages, and that their motivation for enrolling was elsewhere.

The World Vision office where the training took place is next to my home. I was abroad before and I do not need any training but I went for [the eldworker]. I did not stay the whole day. I signed in and went for the lunch box.

Pressure for a uniform number of attendants at each session in all sites, regardless of the interest in, familiarity with, or tolerance for women labour migration in a particular community resulted in a medley assembly of women. Trainers admitted that the more heterogeneous the group, the more arduous was their task. Keeping participants

interested could be quite a challenge. Within the NGO, there were complaints about the pressure for numbers, but no one openly questioned this requirement. Thus, 'women potential migrant workers' could be anyone, an undifferentiated population imagined by planners sitting in a faraway place. Such erroneous assumption actually muddled up the focus of the WiF messages.

7.3 "ALL WOMEN ARE POTENTIAL MIGRANT WORKERS": A PROBLEMATIC THEORY

One NGO manager blamed *eldworkers* for not explaining the purpose of the WiF programme clearly enough, and for failing to attract the 'right' candidates to the training. The view that 'all women are potential migrant workers', a slogan repeatedly uttered, could justify the assumption that *eldworkers* have a large population to tap into. However, blaming *eldworkers* for a mismatch between a theoretical position (or wishful thinking) and reality on the ground is not useful. Fieldworkers know their community often better than NGO managers, and many of them effectively recognised that the women most likely to migrate are not 'all' women but rather correspond to certain types.

Women who migrate here are mostly widows, divorced or abandoned women. Some have husbands earning very little or earning well but providing little. I could not get to the pre-decision orientation all the women preparing for migration. There are many reasons for this. They are the poorest. These women often work every day for their livelihood, or they have young children and no one to look after them. We had a rule not to bring small children. In each batch, I try to ensure that 5 or 6 women would attend from such background.

Not allowing women to bring their small children and not conducting training sessions on Friday (the weekly holiday) restrained the participation of poor working women. Another problem, insufficiently recognised, is how attendance to the training may expose women interested in migration and attract dubious recruiters. It could signal an eminent departure that many women would rather keep secret (the reasons for which are discussed later).

Moreover, women whose profile corresponded to the description from the *eldworker* above may have had no wish to attend the WiF training. One such woman we met we shall name Jahanara. The training venue was located only a few metres from

her home and the fieldworker tried hard to convince her to join but Jahanara was adamant. She said she did not have the guts to confront 'respectable' society. Aged 28, poor, uneducated, good looking, twice divorced, and the mother of a 9 year old daughter, Jahanara's profile would fit what most *dalals* would recognise as a suitable candidate for migration (presuming her vulnerability and her attractiveness to potential employers). When we first met Jahanara, she had just returned from Saudi Arabia, having left with another woman from her neighbourhood and returning six weeks later, alone. Why did she come back when her neighbour stayed? Could she not cope with the work as her companion did? Jahanara faced accusations to which she could not easily respond publicly. She narrates her story to the researcher six weeks after her return.

I left for Saudi Arabia on 13 August 2015. My first employer was a man with 2 wives and 5 unmarried sons. He made it very clear that he purchased Bangladeshi girls for one purpose only. One Indonesian woman was responsible for the cooking and another Bangladeshi girl was there for enjoyment work. I was there for 4 days, maltreated and roughed up. The employer said he purchased me from a Bangladeshi man for 4 lak taka. I refused to do the enjoyment work for which I was recruited, so he sold me to another man. As I was travelling with that man, the police arrested us, and I was sent to jail where I stayed 1 month.

Jahanara is sent to a job she has not signed for and to which she does not consent. Her powerful *dalal* enjoyed the protection of the ruling party and she feared him. She was cheated (trafficked?) but did not seek justice or compensation. De ant, she commented:

by the women. ¹⁶ Possibly in response to these protests, the NGO later modified their message about *dalals* in the course of the research.

TABLE 15: COHORT WOMEN'S EXPECTATIONS FROM THE TRAINING

	Number	%
To be provided with 'good visa'	27	55.1
To get assistance if difficulties are faced abroad	16	32.7
A few messages appreciated but did not suffice to fulfil expectations	14	28.6
To obtain a loan from the Probashi Kallyan Bank	12	24.5
To get assistance for passport application	6	12.2
No specific expectation	7	14.3
To get assistance in opening a bank account	3	6.1
To get a 'certificate'	1	2.0
Missing info	3	6.1

Source: WiF Study 2015–17. Multiple answers recorded.

The WiF messages generally echo official government discourses regarding services offered to migrant workers. Women are informed of the procedures and costs in obtaining a passport and are advised to file the application without recourse to a paid intermediary. One woman followed this advice, but after facing numerous hassles and delays she went to a *dalal* like everyone else. Another attractive proposition is the possibility of obtaining a loan from the Probashi Kallyan Bank, and one quarter of the women interviewed mentioned this was a major reason for enlisting in the training. To the best of our knowledge, however, no one in any of the 3 sites under study obtained such a loan. One husband of a migrant woman voiced his frustration in this regard:

My wife wanted a loan from the PKB [Probashi Kollan Bank]. The NGO made us dream about this but it is a promise that could not be delivered. They lied to us. We lost money and time. Because of all

the hassle, my wife missed a flight and had to postpone her departure. The NGO said that after handing over all documents we would get the loan within 2 days. To get this loan, we spent 4,000 Taka. We collected everything required and, in the end, we got only harassment. Getting 3 guarantors was particularly difficult. We are a test case. We can now tell anyone who wants to hear that all these beautiful words about getting a loan are pure lies. That experience has been a great disappointment. We lost our trust in the NGO.

The NGO knows (or should know) the poor performance of the government agency, so the question is why they would promote a service so uncritically. One NGO manager commented that documenting the applications that women filed for the bank loan can be useful for the NGO's advocacy

women can now migrate legally and openly. They need not hide, as in the past. At the end of the first day, trainers ask how many women are interested in migrating and the number of those raising their hand is markedly higher than earlier in the day when the same question was put to them. The new number is inscribed on the report sheet. Is the recorded increase interpreted as the successful delivery of the WiF messages? It certainly appears so.

Trainers and fieldworkers denied they were promoting women labour migration and pointed out that the WiF messages could also convince a woman not to migrate as she weighed the costs and benefits. They say that their purpose is to encourage women to take a 'rational' decision and make an informed choice. Whatever the intention, there is no doubt that participation in the training boosted interest in migration for many women who never thought of migrating before. It is worth noting, that the stigmatisation migrant women suffered in the past, and still do to some extent today, is brushed aside in these training sessions. Messages stress that women have rights and migrating legally for work is a legitimate option. Legal migrants sign contracts that stipulate employer's obligations and workers entitlements. These 'rights' convinced some women that risks were minimal and they lost their fears about migration. Many underestimated the difficulties they would face in convincing their husband and other family members that migration is now a respectable option, as will be shown in the next section. The 11 women who considered themselves misled by the WiF messages were originally among the most enthusiastic participants in the training. After they 'failed' migration, they became the most critical blaming the NGO for the false sense of security the training had instilled in them. They received partial or inaccurate information and the 'rights' announced were meaningless abroad and could not be claimed.

7.6 MESSAGES USEFUL HERE BUT DANGEROUS TO APPLY ABROAD

Women's appreciation of the training commonly distinguished between information and advice that could be useful in their own society but could not apply abroad and would even be risky to attempt. The rights one may claim at home should not be expected abroad. There was wide consensus on this point and it would be foolish, indeed dangerous,

to pretend otherwise. For example, advice given to negotiate with the employer in case of conflict was judged inapplicable, regardless of language skills. An experienced migrant commented:

I liked the messages. But what one needs to know to succeed abroad is not part of it. This is not a training to succeed abroad. This is good to look after oneself here. All this talk about rights, I don't believe it. Here in my own place, I have rights but abroad I must do as I am told. All this talk about patiently negotiating with the employer is nonsense. This is not the way it works abroad.

Another woman in her mid-thirties with 3 migration episodes and considerable 'success' compares the situation of a migrant woman in her employer's home to that of a new wife in her in-laws' home. A new wife (*nuton bou*) is expected to serve all the members of the household patiently and selflessly, and forget her own needs. Even though marriage practices are changing, this notion is still powerful. The statement above may be a reaction to the trainer's affirmation that migrant women have rights in the house of their employers. A third woman, aged 42 and recently widowed, claimed to have enjoyed rights, power and freedom within her own family. Yet, when she opted for migration, she 'knew' that one should be mentally prepared for any kind of work.

I knew what it means to go abroad. It means selling oneself. It means handing over the key, surrendering. It means going by their wishes.

Even when accepting to "hand over the key," candidates for migration still may not be successful. The woman quoted above returned after two months unable to complete her contract, as her body could not cope with the demands of the employer. One is reminded here of Pierre Bourdieu's habitus theory.¹⁸ There could be a serious mismatch (*døchirement* is the word Bourdieu uses) between dispositions incorporated earlier (for example, on sexual behaviour) and the requirement of the job (in this case commercial sex). Agents undergoing such *døchirement* generally acquire greater awareness of what they had taken for granted, says Bourdieu. Case stories amply demonstrate that migration, more than training, is the disturbing experience and the eye opener.

18. In *Méditations pascaliennes*, collection Liber, Seuil, 1997, p.190–191

me sad and angry. From birth, I did not get any rights. Two husbands cheated me. Everybody cheated me. I have two assets that give me some rights: my body and the money I earn from it.

“Granting ‘humanity’ to everyone in a purely formal way amounts to exclude, under the cover of ‘humanity’, all those dispossessed of the means to realise it,” wrote Pierre Bourdieu.¹⁹ In their own way, Asha and Renu confirm the sociologists’ words. Even though migration provided some economic gains, they have been largely deprived of the social, cultural and symbolic capital, which makes a person valued. Both women earned (and learned) with their bodies. When we met them, both had become the fervent followers of a *pir*, surrendering to a ‘living saint’ that others in the village regard as an exploiter of women’s credulity. Interestingly, 5 of the 14 cohort women in site 2 were followers of the same *pir*. Describing such cult is outside the scope of this report. Let it only be said that the dispositions cultivated among *pir* followers (the surrendering) stand diametrically opposed to the ‘rational’ attitude in decision-making promoted at the WiF training.

Those who are pir followers are not concerned with material wealth. They seek their path, try to serve their pir, help others, offer them shelter, feed them. Girls exposed to predators come here to get shelter. The pir has the power to protect them. (Raju, a woman pir follower who administers Renu’s remittances)

7.8 ON THE NOTION OF RIGHTS

In the first round of interviews, over a quarter of the women stated their appreciation of messages on rights. One would expect a larger proportion of participants expressing a favourable opinion in this regard, but ‘rights’ are a complicated matter. How do normative roles at different stages of their life allow women of different socio-economic backgrounds to claim rights? The WiF training announced universal rights that women should enjoy as women, as workers and as citizen. It hardly touched upon issues of applicability.

Throughout the research, we returned to the notion of rights. As mentioned, some women confidently asserted having been able to exert rights, power and freedom within the family. They

claimed they had a good understanding of these notions and the WiF training did not enhance their knowledge. These women are often middle age and de facto head of family. Except one woman who had been candidate at a local election, none claimed or expected ‘rights’, power and influence beyond the family. Candidates for migration on the whole do not belong to powerful families.

I can take some decisions for the household. No one outside the family wants to hear my opinion. I am not the wife of any Chairman, Member or Leader. I am a small fish.

Exceptional situations may also create conditions for women to exert exceptional rights but with the end of the exception, ‘normality’ is restored. This is what happened to Parul, described earlier. Being the eldest among siblings, she took a factory job at the age of 13 to provide for her sisters and brother. For several years, her position gave her considerable ‘rights’, power and influence but as her sisters and brother grew up and started earning, Parul lost her ascendancy. Following a tragic incident, she gave up her factory job and became dependent on her siblings, serving their needs for her keep. The situation then became completely reversed. When her brother married and demanded to bring his new wife at home (re-affirming virilocality as the dominant norm), Parul was pressed to vacate the parental home. She then placed her hope in

when her husband got sick. She became head of family when he died and enjoyed a degree of power and autonomy. Her two sons are now adults. They can provide for her and they categorically refuse their mother the 'right' to migrate, let alone work outside the home. Like Parul, Sabiha lost the 'rights' she once enjoyed.

In this family, I am no better than a servant. I work and I get fed. I have not earned for many years. This is why I have no value. My sons believe that their honour would suffer if I went abroad at my age. My sons, and many people here, do not understand that food and clothing in not all one needs and desires in life.

The diktat of rank and respectability may not accord with the 'rights' proclaimed at the training. For several women, the discourse on women's rights in an all-women assembly raises no difficulty, but it is too controversial even to be repeated at home in front of husbands.

All this talk about rights, I liked it very much but there is no way I can share it with my husband. He would feel insulted and would not tolerate it.

In my village, if husbands knew, they would not allow their wives to listen to such messages. Husbands want to rule over their wives and keep check on them.

These two women, one in her mid-twenties and the other in her early-thirties, are married to men who strongly oppose their migration. So, what is left of the discourse on rights once the training is over? Evaluating the long-term impact of exposure to the notion of 'rights' is not a simple affair, even more so as points of view change in the course of time. The message could be forgotten for a while but like a seed remaining dormant for a season, it could well germinate and grow later when conditions are adequate.

8. 'Failed' migration: Three case histories

Some of the most severe critiques of the WiF training were expressed by women who migrated for the first time after hearing about

and expecting 'safe migration'. We present here the case histories of three women who sought repatriation after being given 'work' that they were not contracted for and were not willing to provide. The rights they were led to expect in the WiF training were found to be non-existent. In the first interviews soon after their return, the women are angry and highly critical of the WiF messages. Met again a year later, their assessment is more nuanced as they reflect on a succession of events. Repatriation is a moment of relief and joy in their entourage, but suspicion soon follows and their return leads to embarrassing questions. Relationships with the husband and other family members deteriorates and a sense of personal failure grows. If 'successful' migration means earning well and preserving one's reputation, these women fare badly on both counts. In these trying circumstances, WiF messages are remembered and the notion of 'rights' re-considered.

8.1 CASE ONE: SHIKHA

Shikha is 23 years old and married with one child. She is secretly preparing her migration when she hears of the WiF training, which she eagerly joins. Hoping to work in a garment factory, a neighbour convinces her to leave for Saudi Arabia with a 'house' visa instead. On the eve of her departure, her worried mother calls upon the NGO fieldworker who is their neighbour seeking re-assurance. The latter expresses her faith in the efficacy of the WiF training and tells the mother not to fear – Shikha is well equipped to deal with the situation abroad.

Eleven days after arrival, a distressed Shikha calls her husband and her mother and demands to be repatriated. She makes several phone calls during the following two days. The fieldworker recommends that the phone be kept ringing. According to the latter, Shikha is acting childishly and is not taking sufficient time to adjust. However, sensing that her daughter could be in danger, the mother picks up the phone and takes her daughter's distress seriously. Shikha also calls the NGO helpline from the employer's home. The social worker tells her to stay put, but two days later Shikha runs away carrying a copy of her papers. She is rapidly picked up by the police who call her employer and request him to drive Shikha to the employment agency. Shikha calls the NGO again from the agency. The complicated situation in which Shikha finds herself, the inability

of the NGO social worker to understand a problem that Shikha cannot reveal, the social worker's impatience, the technical difficulties with the line repeatedly being cut off show the limitations of a service repeatedly highlighted at the training.²¹

At the NGO office, one of the trainers remembers Shikha as an exemplary participant. How could this happen? Something obviously went very wrong. One of our researchers by chance is present at the NGO office when Shikha calls from Saudi Arabia and follows the conversation. Shikha returns within two months of her departure and is interviewed one week later. Her husband and her mother had been interviewed 3 times already. Note that Shikha is not part of the original cohort. She is included as an additional case from round 2.

Shikha (20 May 2016)

My passport says I am 27 years old, but my real age is 23. I left on the 17th of March and returned on the 13th of May. I first had a passport made for 8,000 Taka. I stole money from my husband's shop to pay for it. I did all of this in secrecy. Seeing how well migrant women did, I wanted to do the same. When I heard that [the NGO] is offering training to women planning to go abroad, I asked the fieldworker to include me. I attended the 2-day and the 5-day training. My husband did not agree to my departure. He loves me very much and I could not finally convince him. My hope was to go to Jordan with a garment visa. But I fell in a trap. I listened to the sweet talk of a neighbour and I left for Saudi Arabia instead. I am responsible for my bad luck. That woman works for her nephew who is a big dalal in Fakirapool. They promised me a garment job in Saudi Arabia, they talked of good salary, light work, free transport, board and lodging. I would get a 2-year visa with the possibility to extend for 1 more year. I needed to pay only 30,000 Taka. I rapidly gave my consent. My husband and my mother said I should take time, but I did not listen.

At the airport [in Dhaka], I had a copy of my visa made in a hurry. I got this idea from

[the NGO] and I thank them for it. I left a copy of my documents with my husband and took another set with me hiding it in my clothes. I was picked up at the airport [in Saudi Arabia] and taken to the agency office. From there, the employer took me to Riyadh. I rapidly understood that I was given a house visa. The employer had 11 children, 4 sons and 7 daughters. His wife was pregnant. In that country, when a wife is pregnant, the husband can sleep with the maid. This is their custom. The wife made me understand that she had no objection. The grownup sons also disturbed me. I was given a room below the staircase, which had no lock on the door. Two days after my arrival, the trouble began. I could not accept this. I left from the house on the 17th day.

In this time, I phoned [the NGO] office. A woman picked up the phone. She said, why do you want to come back. I could not tell her the real reason, I spoke about the food I could not eat and that I felt depressed. She kept asking me if there was any other reason, but I did not reveal the real problem. I feared for my honour and my reputation. She insisted. She said she was all alone and I could speak freely but I did not believe her. I called my family several times. I cried a lot. I said I would die if I was forced to stay. Two days after these phone calls, I left my employer's house. Again, I called [the NGO] from the agency office. Communication was difficult. I could not tell them where I was. They got annoyed with me. I handed the phone to a Bangladeshi man nearby and he told them [the NGO] told me not to move from there. They said at least 3 to 4 months would be required to get me repatriated through government channels. My guardians went to the [NGO] office. They were told that at least 150,000 Taka would have to be paid and they repeated it would take 3 to 4 months. Hearing this, my husband was a bit rude with them. I had done everything according to their instructions. They promised we would get help but that is all they had to say. My husband and my

21. Presented as part of a package of services that the NGO offers to migrant women, the help line predates the WiF programme and

mother did not return to the [NGO] office and I no longer communicated with them.

Desperate to bring back his wife, the husband went to the agency in Fakirapool and pleaded with his mother-in-law and his child at his side. In the end, the agency agreed to send back Shikha if the family paid 50,000 Taka. Assets were sold in a hurry, the money paid and Shikha was back 4 days later. The rapid denouement of this affair for a cost much lower than what the NGO had announced made Shikha and her husband even more critical towards the NGO's offer of assistance.

Shikha's husband

[the NGO] did not provide any help, to the contrary, they complicated matters and after visiting their office we felt even more depressed. Already, we were under pressure, as we did not share our problem with anyone. When [the NGO] talked of 3 to 4 months before Shikha could come back and cost that could run as high as 150,000 Taka, I got very angry. My mother-in-law asked me to remain calm. She said we should beg for help, not demand it outright I went to the agency. My mother-in-law cried. We behaved as though we were the ones who had done something wrong. We even brought my daughter to the office and prayed to them to bring back her mother. We pleaded and kept our head low. At one stage, someone in that office said that if we paid 50,000 Taka, Shikha could be brought back. We raised the amount and brought it to the office without telling anything to relatives and neighbours. We gave the money on the 9th May and Shikha was back on the 13th.

Shikha returned determined never to migrate again.

Shikha (20 May 2016)

I spent 1 month and 8 days at the agency office. I don't want to talk about what I saw there. I don't want to remember it. Before I left, I promised my husband on the Quran that I would not allow anyone to touch my body. I took beatings, but I kept my word. How can I explain this to people? I feared all the time ... I will never advise

anybody to go. I have seen it now. Those who are involved in the work I refused will not talk about it either. I don't need money if it requires selling my honour. Those who need money, they can do it.

Ten months later, Shikha's opinion had changed and she was considering migrating again.

Shikha, (12 March 2017)

When I came back, I felt welcome. My family was pleased to see me ... They cried with me on the phone ... My husband and my mother did everything in their power to rescue me. But less than a week after my return, they started blaming me. They said I wasted their time, their money and their reputation. My husband got back part of the money he spent for me, but he still blames me. He says: I left dancing-dancing [all excited] and I came back the same way. He is right. I left and came back without thinking much. I was wrong. If I had taken the time, I would not have come back so quickly. I am not the only one who faced a proposition such as the employer made to me. Many women face the same. Employers use their maids and to earn more they propose them to other men. There are also employers who bring women only to do a business out of them. What would have happened if I had accepted I do not know because I refused from the start. Now I think I should have accepted. This is not such difficult work. I could manage. I could have left when considering it was enough. I would have come back with some money then.

Shikha clearly had lost much of her fears. She had wanted to safeguard the good relationship with her husband, but it deteriorated anyway. She worried about losing her reputation but could see that successful migrant women (those likely to put up with employers' demands) are admired for the money they earn. The fear of committing 'sin' no longer appears in her speech. What employers abroad request of their *khedima*,²² Shikha now calls 'work' and she goes on explaining with remarkable details the different arrangements under which women are employed in commercial sex. This is not such difficult 'work', she says.

22. Arabic word for female servant or domestic worker commonly used in Bangla conversation. Pronounced 'khaddama', it also depicts a role specific to Middle East societies.

I am a good-looking woman and I am young. I had the ability to do the work I was given abroad. But I refused. I feared for three reasons: my husband, judgment after death and what society and neighbours would say. I could have applied [the

would have to solve my problem. I knew father did not have the money [they asked for] for repatriation and I did not want to rot there. I decided to do the necessary. I had no choice. I earned my return ticket. I asked the office people how many days it would take to earn 80,000 Taka. They told me I should just work, and they would inform me when the necessary amount would be earned. After 22 days, they bought my ticket and took me to the airport. I am angry with the NGO [the fieldworker] is from here. I will not say anything to her. What I have to say, I will say to others. Their nice words, what utility did they have? I took the 2-day training. What I learned was of no use here and it did not help me to manage problems abroad either. What can one learn in 2 days, anyway? How can one change what has been instilled from birth? How can one acquire new convictions, develop courage and strength? How is that possible? The [NGO] people did not know I had come back. The fieldworker met me by chance and she was astonished to see me.

Lily was interviewed two more times. During the third round, she was working in a local factory, not earning much but pleased to contribute to the household and pay for her father's medicines. Her references to having been forcibly engaged in 'forbidden' work were gone – she now mentioned returning in a very perturbed state but gave a different explanation. She says her husband bewitched her and treatment to neutralise the harmful effect of the *chalan kora* started before she returned. Lily repeats the story the *dalal* – a distant relative – circulated about her.

Lily (15 and 22 July, 2016)

I came back after 22 days. I spent 10 days at the employer's home and 12 days at the agency. The first week, I was fine. The second week, I don't know what happened, I had burning sensations, I felt restless, I could not sleep. Uncle [the dalal] went to a fakir and explained to him that my husband had bewitched me (chalan kora) in such a way that I could not stay quiet. My husband was angry because I had divorced him. It was feared that he had used such strong witchcraft that I could have died if uncle and father had not treated me. If you had seen me when I came back, you

would have understood my condition. I was hardly alive. When I was abroad, I was not myself. I was terrorized. I could not sleep. I thought somebody might kill me.

This time, Lily described her stay in Jordan as much shorter – 22 days – a discrepancy with her earlier account, which is puzzling. Her passport was checked, and the dates stamped were those she gave (with precision) in the first place. Why?

about her (you had said) [discrepancy] [T* [condition] my role]

narratives recorded at different times show the tortuous paths of migratory journeys, the initial impulse, the hope and the fear, the blacking out of intolerable occurrences, the changing perceptions, the transformations and the re-consideration of risks and benefits. This relatively long period allows for the recording of important changes in women's dispositions and life circumstances. We see that women who 'fail' migration (and some who succeed) do not resume the place they occupied before leaving home. Relationships with family members are altered, as migration changes the migrant's perspectives and family expectations. The profoundly transformative effects of cross border migration that we observed here has been found in our previous research as well.

Fewer rounds of interviews and a narrower time frame would not have captured many of the important changes that take place over time. Positions and identities here are not 'frozen', instead migrants are depicted journeying through a historical course with a 'before' and an 'after' and numerous pains, trials and tensions in between. Women who 'fail' migration and could qualify as victims of trafficking at one stage of their migratory journey, later emerge transformed with a new perspective and views of their future, having re-interpreted the past. This is how 'victims of trafficking' should not be essentialised and opposed to 'successful migrants' as these labels may characterise different phases in the migratory journey of a same person. Our research methods allow for the study of these transformative processes and may not serve well those holding strongly ideological and often polarised views on women labour migration. Yet, they more justly reflect migrant women's journeys in their complexity. Shahana, a 26-year-old woman who earned exceptionally well abroad after being cheated and abused makes a sobering assessment of her 'success'.

Those who go abroad cannot be winners in every way. There are always losses somewhere. All one can see is money. One can impress with land and beautiful buildings but what are the inner feelings, only the migrant knows. When I consider myself, I think I both lost and gained.

9. Cohort two: husbands and family members

To review, the first cohort originally had 40 women selected on the basis of their enrolment in the WiF training programme, and their intention to migrate. 9 more women were added to this sample, who migrated after hearing the WiF messages and returned early unable to satisfy the employer and complete their contract. One or several of the family members of these 49 women interviewed in several rounds constitute the second cohort. In this cohort, there are 57 respondents – 40 men and 17 women comprised of: 23 husbands, 12 mothers, 4 fathers, 4 brothers, 5 sons, and 9 individuals with other relationships. These interviews throw light on how women candidates for migration have been encouraged or discouraged in their migration, with it being precipitated, delayed or abandoned. Table 17 shows the number of interviews by relationship and site. Site 2 (Balupara) has the highest incidence of women labour migration and number of informants. Table 18 shows educational levels, which are remarkably low – 75 per cent are either illiterate or did not study beyond primary school.

TABLE 17: COHORT TWO: RELATIONSHIP WITH POTENTIAL MIGRANT WOMAN BY SITE

Relation	Site 1	Site 2 (Balupara)	Site 3	Total (%)
Husband	7	10	6	23 (41.3)
Mother	2	7	3	12 (20.6)
Father			4	4 (6.9)
Brother		3	1	4 (6.9)
Son	2	2	1	5 (8.6)
Maternal Uncle		2		2 (3.4)
Son-in-law		1		1 (1.7)
Daughter	1	1	1	3 (5.2)
Daughter-in-law	1			1 (1.7)
Pir and his wife		2		2 (3.4)
Total	13	28	16	57 (100)

Source: WiF Study 2015-17

9.1 INTERVIEWS WITH HUSBANDS

A majority of the women are married, and husbands form the largest group of interviewees. Most husbands could be interviewed and those missed out on the first round were met later on. One wife requested we did not interview her husband as it could endanger her security and the 'visiting' husbands of Balupara women also proved difficult to meet. Overall, 60 interviews were held with 23 husbands in 4 rounds.

TABLE 19: NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS WITH HUSBANDS PER ROUNDS

Location	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4	Total
Site 1	6	6	6		18
Site 2	7	8	6	1	22
Site 3	6	7	6	1	20
Total	19	21	18	2	60

Out of the 23 husbands interviewed, 9 opposed their wife's migration project, 7 supported it, 4 held inconsistent views and 3 were powerless and had no say in the matter.

Men who oppose their wife's migration

It should be pointed out that this relatively high level of opposition (39 percent of the interviewed husbands) is found amongst men whose wife wish to migrate and not among the general population. Husbands who oppose their wife's migration may

not always stop it but there are consequences for the marriage. These husbands are found in all sites, including Balupara. Such men generally consider their income sufficient to support family needs. They are 'real' men who can feed their family and they despise husbands who live off their wife's earning. They generally hold that migrant women lose their purity and honour and become *noshto* or 'spoiled'. The violence of the words some of them emit shows how threatening the proposition can be to their sense of manhood. Here is Sharif Mia:

My wife told me she wanted to go abroad to work. I told her clearly that the day she leaves, she is also walking away from me. She is my son's mother. She did what she wanted before marriage but, as a husband, it is my duty to keep her on the right path. Women who go abroad get de-led. In this way, their marriage ends. Only husbands without backbone stay married to such women. Those who are not repulsed by this, those who do not understand what a sin is, such husbands can stay. I am not one of those.

Sharif Mia has two wives. He met his second wife, Dina, at the garment factory where they both worked, her as a machine operator and him as a master cutter. They had a love affair, married and a child was born. Dina owned a home in Balupara and the couple moved there. For Sharif Mia, the place was convenient, close to his work place, cheap, and more comfortable. After giving birth, Dina stopped

working overtime and eventually quit her factory job under pressure from her husband. She has a son from a previous marriage that Sharif Mia would not accept. He also has a son with his first wife but does not regard their respective situations as equivalent. Although he mostly lives in Balupara, Sharif Mia declares his address to be in Gopalganj where his natal family and his first wife reside.

At home [Gopalganj], I live with my first wife and my 8-year-old son. All brothers and sisters are married and none of them live in a bustee-like place such as [Balupara]. In Gopalganj, women do not work abroad. Such move was unseen before. A few destitute women without husband migrate today. They are enticed by dalals who cheat them.

Using women's migration as the ultimate reference for a respectable society, Sharif Mia's patriarchal views are very clear. He positions his two wives in two radically different environments, the 'good' society where his first wife lives and the despicable bustee-like place where Dina and her family belong. Speaking of the latter, he says:

I don't like her family. They are without men, unruly. They are six sisters and her father is an elderly man. One sister works abroad. She sends visas to her husband and he recruits women. He sits at home and does nothing except looking for candidates for migration. He is not a real man. He lives with his mother-in-law and his 4 children. He depends on his wife's income. I am embarrassed to present him as my relative. I spend little time here. I don't socialize with people. [Dina] has high ambitions. She is a daughter. I don't like this. I asked her to give up her factory job.

Dina insists she would migrate in spite of her husband's opposition, but she still tried to save her marriage for the respectability it confers. Her father walked away from her mother when she was a child and the all-female household was the object of malevolent gossip. This left Dina with a bitter taste, and she wants to avoid finding herself in a similar situation. A new pregnancy delayed her departure, but she still did not give up her intention to migrate, as her mother and sisters

could offer support. At the last round, relationship between Dina and Sharif Mia had grown sour and violence regularly flared up.²⁵ Dina declared that she would definitely migrate and make her eldest son as the man-of-the-house. She later migrated to Saudi Arabia, which we will discuss later.

Mohiuddin is another polygamist husband who praised an honour-bound society (*samaj*²⁶) where wives do not migrate and mind their husband's authority. A long-route bus driver, he sleeps at different places depending on his itinerary. One of his wives and mother to his son, is a Balupara woman. He despises both the wife and the place.

I did not truly know about the place and its people before I signed a marriage contract. I met [my wife] on the road. I made the mistake of having a relationship with her. I fell into a trap. I have come to understand that these people belong to the street. For them, everything is possible. I tried to restrain her and put her on the right path but did not succeed. I allowed her to migrate reluctantly. She would not have minded my word anyway. This was the first time, but I clearly did not give permission the second time. She deceived me. I used to control her, and she accepted my rule to some degree, but I have now given up to save my honour. My true wife lives in Comilla. She never deceives me because she belongs to the samaj. Here, there is no samaj. Women do as they please. They are free and daring whether they migrate or not.

Both of these polygamist husbands draw a 'moral' map of the territory in accordance with the incidence of women labour migration, locations reputed not to allow their women to migrate holding the highest ground. The discourse of the two men bears comparison with brothel clients who engage with 'fallen' women and return to their 'true' wives and the sanctity of their homes, the latter being the 'real' address from which social identity and rank are derived. The ability to move back and forth between sites (and women) without getting inherently stained/polluted – a kind of migration – is a man's privilege and a marker of their manhood. These men's positions are nonetheless highly ambiguous as they live in Balupara, at least part of

social formation of Bangladesh society, changing in time and space, yet recognisable in its continuity. A moral person is deemed to belong to the samaj and adhere to its principles. To say that an individual is without samaj is denigrating and insulting. The law of the State and the norms prevailing in local *samaj* may well differ. This could be the case for women labour migration, legal yet frowned upon in local *samaj*.

25. Mona left for Saudi Arabia on 1st January 2018.

26. *Samaj* here refers to a well-ordered moral society that upholds principles applying in a specific religious tradition. Abiding by its norms and values (and keeping women 'in their place') procures honour and respect to male-headed households. *Samaj* is a core

me to be there at his side all the time. This is not for the love of me. It is domination.

What can I do with a husband who does not work and does not know how to plan? How can I improve our condition? In the last 3 months, we both have been unemployed and without income. All our savings are gone.

becomes apparent that the *pir* controls Farzana and her entire family. He decides Farzana's migration, covers the cost and organises everything. Farzana's dependency on the *pir* has a long history. At the age of 8, her father, himself a *pir* devotee, 'gave' his daughter to the *pir*. When Farzana was 14-years-old, the *pir* arranged her marriage to an orphan boy who inherited from his mother ²⁷ a plot of land adjacent to the *pir*. The two households function as one and Farzana spends more time with the *pir* than with her husband. Jamal says he is uncertain as to who actually fathered the five children Farzana gave birth to. Farzana migrates to Saudi Arabia on 15 April 2016. When asked about his wife, Jamal replies:

[The pir] can tell you everything about Farzana. He is her ancestor for 14 generations [said with derision]. He decides. She follows his word and he sets conditions in everything. I see with my eyes, I hear with my ears, but I keep my mouth shut. I do not have the ability to protest. I do not have the stature Farzana did not discuss anything with me and it was not in my power to give her any advice. I did not go to the airport to say goodbye to her. The pir and the dalal went Farzana told me that every month the pir would give me money for the household. He would do so whether he gets remittances or not. Dt w. You will w she said On 16th of May, I got 4,000 Taka. He said Farzana had sent money. I did not ask how much. I knew [the pir] would get first rights over her income.

Relationships between the *pir* and his female devotees is the object of much criticism in the community. The

pir] would not necessarily (Farzana was) 19.8 (as 1) 35 (4-year-old) 1ge223Dt w actually someth the, rzana and

migration get mired with other social and cultural considerations. Interviews show women labour migration to be a hotly debated topic in which understandings profoundly differ within families and at community level, giving rise to sympathies and collaborations, oppositions and conflicts. Women labour migration impacts individuals, families, lineages and communities leaving an imprint on the country as a whole with districts ranked depending on the prevalence of women labour migration. The stories expose a recurrent gender dimension intersecting with considerations of class and rank. The complex dynamics of women [and men] labour migration briefly introduced here warrant more analysis than the scope of this report can offer.

10. Cohort three: managers, trainers and fieldworkers

Twelve people are interviewed in the third cohort: 6 fieldworkers, 2 trainers and the NGO chairman are interviewed twice, while the project manager – who left the project before the second round – a project officer, and a social worker who answers the NGO helpline are interviewed once. The NGO signed a contract with ILO stipulating collaboration with researchers and there is no difficulty in obtaining individual meetings at mutually agreed locations. Even after the fieldworkers completed the term of their employment (11 months) and were uncertain whether they would be re-employed, they still agreed to meet. This is a difficult time for them and we sense caution in their words as if what they say could affect their chance to be re-employed.

As seen in Table 20, the WiF implementation team is fairly young and educational levels are relatively high, with six people holding post-graduate degrees, four being graduates, and two having studied up to secondary level. Personal experience of migration and/or engagement with women migrant workers is not given the same importance as academic achievement, and most have never worked on migration-related issues prior to their engagement with WiF. Those with experience of migration worked with male migrants or the wives of male migrant workers. Three NGO staff organised training for the latter on use of remittances and prevention of HIV. Such activities can be presented as valuable experience, but wives of male migrant workers and female migrant workers are quite distinct populations. Wives incur no loss of status for the migration of their husbands and they need not infringe rules of *purdah* or norms of feminine propriety.

Remittances may even allow them to observe a stricter seclusion and be seen as 'good' women. If the wives of migrant workers do not constitute a homogeneous group, their socio-economic levels are generally higher and gender roles in their households are more in line with dominant norms. The NGO management apparently ignored these important social demarcations, which is also evident in the uncritical adoption of the problematic theory that 'all women are potential migrant workers'.

Interestingly, one fieldworker had been employed on an HIV prevention programme targeting women migrant workers in 2004. She does not mention this engagement in the interview and we found out accidentally from one of her former colleagues who expressed dismay after hearing the WiF messages. The former colleague wondered how the discourse could have switched so radically pointing out how different the NGO message was then as risks of migration for women are highlighted and women are advised to be cautious and even to curtail their movements. This encounter is a useful reminder. How do NGO workers today, including the NGO we studied, subscribe to the new narrative on 'rights'? How can 'rights' apply to the situation of women labour migrants as they know it, and have they given any thought to this? Or is the question simply irrelevant, the new speak being a consequence of working for different bosses who decide the 'fashion' of the day? Unfortunately, these issues could not be discussed freely with the NGO we studied. At least one manager refused to engage in any debate posturing as an expert and pointing out that he had nothing new to learn on 'safe migration'. For such 'experts', research is also a waste of time.

10.1 RECRUITMENT PROCEDURES

The NGO recruited as fieldworkers young women resident in the study area.

TABLE 20: COHORT 4: PROFILE OF INTERVIEWED STAFF AND MANAGEMENT

[Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted]

When a fieldworker was recruited for this union, I was not the first choice but the candidate selected resigned after some time and I was offered the job. One of the requirements was that I live within the union. I grew up in [this place] but I lived outside. I promised I would come to live here, which I did in October 2015.

In some unions, there is no competition for the post.

I was the only candidate applying from this union. When the interviewers heard that I had worked at the union information centre, they were immediately interested in employing me. They were satisfied with my answers about ways to approach people or get assistance to arrange venues for the training.

10.2 SALARY AND WORKING CONDITIONS

The NGO chairman admits staff recruitment to be a troublesome affair given the short duration of the project (originally planned for 11 months). The best candidates generally seek longer-term employment and the remuneration (a standard rate determined by the ILO) is not attractive enough, he says. One fieldworker confirms this opinion:

When people ask me, I am embarrassed to tell them how little I earn for all the work we do. When I compare this salary with my previous job at the union parishad³⁰, where I could clear 4000 to 5000 Taka a month sitting in an office [for a few hours a week], it does not seem fair. I don't feel we are paid sufficiently for the work we do.

Living with one's family in a village, fieldworkers could manage with a monthly salary of 8,000 Taka. On the other hand, trainers who have to rent an accommodation in Dhaka, where the cost of living is much higher, may find the income insufficient. One of them points out further that no overtime is paid for the long hours worked, and ILO does not practice what it preaches.

My monthly salary is 20,000 Taka. Some people are saying this is not bad for a first job but considering the price of everything, this is not a good living wage. This is an ILO-supported project. We

talk about workers' rights and working hours being recognized. What about our rights considering the workload and the working hours we must put in?

All persons interviewed feel the project duration is too short questioning what could be accomplished in such a period of time. They are evidently concerned about the security of their job. In April 2016, while discussions were in their second phase, the fieldworkers (but not the trainers) were left without salary for 2 and a half months. When re-employed, they expected an increase, which was not granted.

I like working for [the NGO] but the salary should be increased. A higher salary would motivate fieldworkers. We told this to brother but he said they may even cut down. Don't they realize this will affect our motivation? We worked very hard. I did not expect the job would be so demanding.

Trainers and fieldworkers undeniably worked hard and long hours. The share of the WiF budget allocated to the grass root delivery of messages may not sufficiently recognise the importance of this work for the success of the project.

10.3 THE T0tualA.8(o24swhat utep sharche)ccomplyThe mee

fe6 Tdj /1 Tf 9(The st)ccomplITJ /T5(, may -0.15pos

interested in the training. The title of the form is a misnomer. Courtyard meetings assemble women who can afford the time and agree to sit and listen to the fieldworker. The meetings we observed gathered housewives, often older women with less work pressure, and students with time to spare. In areas close to industrial zones, women working in factories are noticeably absent. Fieldworkers exert their communication skills, but for questions they cannot answer, they refer to the NGO helpline. One fieldworker admits facing serious challenge from the local *dalals* who attempted to sabotage her work discouraging women to enrol in the training and threatening those enlisted.

At one stage, I felt very frustrated. I told [the NGO] that I would quit the job. I received some advice from [management staff] and [a trainer] talked to me over the phone. She told me that I could share my problems with her. This was helpful.

Once a month, salaries are collected at the NGO office and fieldworkers can meet with the project manager and discuss problems encountered. Otherwise, they manage as they can. One project officer mandated to supervise the fieldworkers' day-to-day activities and assist in the organisation of training seemed to spend little time in the field – at least this is what we conclude when he finds it difficult to locate the fieldworkers and the venues of training. Fieldworkers are solicited for different kinds of assistance, such as filling the form for passport application, or convincing a husband to allow his wife to attend the training. Although some husbands are not easy to talk to as they are against their wife's migration, fieldworkers' intervention can help. All fieldworkers state that their most difficult task is to ensure that 30 women will attend the pre-decision orientation. One fieldworker makes an eloquent description of her work.

My first responsibility is to provide information about safe migration. My second responsibility is to organize the pre-decision orientation meetings, find suitable venues, and motivate a minimum of 30 participants. Moreover, I must select participants for the 5-days pre-departure training. My most difficult time is the 1.8 prior to a pre-decision orientation. I feel tense. Can I ensure that the women who promised to come will actually turn up, or will I fall short of the target? Some people understand us wrongly. They think we are sending women abroad. It is difficult to make them understand that

we are just giving information. Another problem is when women promise to come but do not turn up. Maybe they think it will be a waste of time and they will not learn anything useful. Others come but they do not want to stay. I must make them understand that this orientation is good for them and they will be benefited. Convincing takes a lot of energy. When the venue is far away, some women in need of the orientation do not come. There are also women who were abroad and think of migrating again. Many are reluctant to attend the training and it is quite impossible to bring them.

Motivating women and convincing them that 'the orientation is good for them' appears to be quite hard work, suggesting that the benefits of the training are far from obvious to the targeted population.

10.4 TRAINERS AND PROJECT MANAGER

The project manager, a dynamic woman who largely carries the training component of the WiF project on her shoulder played a key role in the preparation of the training modules. Earlier, she took part in two trainings for trainers held in Kathmandu and in Dhaka. She regards WiF as an experimental project and is open to discussion. When interviewed, the advice given to women not to use the services of a *dalal* is under review in the NGO. WiF followed the government line in this regard but the message is clearly rejected by the potential migrants. "The problem is very tough. We are working on it," she says. She subscribes to the view that all women could be candidates for migration and all should hear the WiF messages. On a trafficking story recently exposed in the media, she comments:

The media only show problems [e.g. trafficked women]. They don't give importance to what we do. I don't give importance to these stories.

Constructing a consensual community is a

more mechanistic approach to their work, others are keen observers and make very pertinent remarks. For example, one elderworker sees her society divided on class lines and discovers how women labour migration remains a contested issue:

Since I have been involved in this work, I can see that there are many people objecting to female migration. No one opposes directly but negative comments are heard. Women who are suffering and struggling do not judge badly. But there is still a section of society that regards female migration very negatively. Such people are solvent and need not worry about their next meal.

Another elderworker is critical of the measures that WiF advocates to ensure 'safe migration':

We tell women they should get their papers checked before leaving. But the reality of work abroad does not correspond to the papers we ask to check. No contract mentions being employed to do bad work.

This is a very pertinent comment. 'Bad work' is not made explicit but everyone understands what it means in relation to migrant women – or at least they think they do. 'Bad work' posits a moral judgment amalgamating a range of actions that do not belong to the same categories in terms of human rights abuse. After all, commercial sex work proposed to consenting women who leave

whether they (renis, r igheboac)49.9rk, r gtive in reucstatelalo not the same even touigs we have seven tas, r v the othera Res, e upoacrestion :k aup kj l of thentrinting ersireetivs and min ple about the 'ecretsk

t p hsedbof the WiF prbjec, f the ers to coducsy(research)49.9(h)TJ T* (on rdher to valucato their wor. In strectionims)TJ T* [gtivon tofollhowupn i tg women w

ale about humantrf ac The uroposdbof thefollhowupnnhowims(oe)Tj T* [lasresh peoplfaInresh about thshe y oumanienmnalad gertignntrf acked or labourntrf acter. edafreor areanting[(Wi)y)TJ T* [(orintlation and(trinting aledoting ae.)2)25k

mistegationsmaeybledrengnind to andboutonlyx

research(.)1749.9Tthelabv es isopoa(ed in theuntion(wealeLil(y)TJ T* [Akhteaelti)-19.7(vsr and hsoywomyknholinnge oftherchsed)TJ T* [(se Chap(eor8, (s ael andThercc)49.9(ildaln (alo not))TJ T* [so samal... Heorhusb andlti)-19.7(vsrin... [an othe)TJ T* [di orac]n and(thye have thatstrlye hpplnrrd.Stheju(t og)199(ranted)TJ T* [to comybauc stan.

With Lily, this is how far the fieldworker 'research' goes. There is cause for reflection here. Issues of abuse and trafficking are not easy to investigate. Lily's ordeal could well qualify as a case of trafficking, yet she has warned members of our research team not to share her story with her neighbours, including the fieldworker. At one stage, we have seen that she goes as far as to erase the intolerable occurrence from her account, and possibly from her memory. Her desire for discretion is understandable and ought to be respected, needless to say. Nonetheless, and in spite of the difficulties involved, a project aiming to combat human trafficking – as WiF describes its objective – should be built on the knowledge of facts. To paraphrase Anne Gallagher, 'forensic investigations' of particular cases are necessary to untangle human trafficking and labour migration. This requires finding out what 'bad work' or 'failed migration' entails and breaking into 'secrets' which – though not impossible – is a real challenge here.

Our investigation leads us to conclude that trainers and fieldworkers remain largely unaware of how close to home episodes of human trafficking – and the victims of such schemes – are found, or could be found. How can one combat that which is ignored? Fieldworkers and trainers may display care and sensibility, yet they are not encouraged to find out what lies beyond the 'secrets' and 'rumours' circulating about migrant women. Admittedly, belonging to the same community as the migrant women creates some limitations, so more thought should be given to how responsibilities for understanding this could be distributed. At the level of the institutions responsible for the WiF programme, however, one can deplore the lack of resources (and interest) in the entire journeys of migrant women. How can a training aiming to combat exploitation and trafficking be constructed, and later assessed, if one ignores concrete situations?

Some may have such faith in the efficacy of training that they expect women to be able to shape the conditions of their employment abroad. In other words, convinced of the rights they 'hold', trained women may alter the balance of power in the house of the employer. Such assumptions are naïve at best and could even be dangerous as the case stories documented in this research demonstrate. Women who 'believed' in human rights had high expectations, including being protected. When it proved inoperative, they were doubly hurt.

11. Conclusion

The WiF project developed messages that value women as workers, decision-makers and entrepreneurs of their life. Women's important – yet largely unrecognised – contributions to the economy and wellbeing of their families, their communities and the country as a whole are highlighted, raising women's confidence and encouraging their ambitions. Women are deemed competent in deciding the course of their life. Any woman may choose to migrate for work and may do so legally and openly, provided she follows government rules and regulations. These messages are a clear departure from an earlier discourse that depicted women as potential or actual victims of exploitation and trafficking and recommended that they curtail their movements, exert extreme caution and stay home. The WiF messages reverse the stigmatising image that women crossing borders suffered for generations and, from this perspective, they are revolutionary.

Within the training venues themselves, the NGO trainers and fieldworkers endeavour and largely succeed in creating a congenial atmosphere that may restore a damaged self-esteem for some participants. Women are recognised with respect and dignity.

v(lateionh37dencegiTD ctims of exploTJ T* [king 55(, proe fo-sexiti

of wide recruitment actually blur the focus of the WiF programme and confuse the participants.

There is a pressure to meet pre-determined quantitative targets and ensure that 32 women attend each training session regardless of variable local interest in women labour migration. Attractive propositions – which cannot be fulfilled – are multiplied to meet the objective. The NGO succeeds in producing numbers but there is a price to pay. It is later criticised for luring participants with false promises.

The strategy adopted ignores the patchy distribution, socially and geographically, of women labour migrations and the profound ambivalence, if not clear disapproval, found in many parts of Bangladesh society regarding women's mobility. This is still the case in spite of favourable government policies, a robust demand for women labour abroad and a lowering of migration costs. Our modest study may illustrate the point: out of the 23 husbands interviewed, 9 object to their wife's migration arguing that migrant women get (necessarily) defiled and destroy family honour apart from challenging men in their role as family providers. A few wives abandon the migration project as a result, others persist and risk their marriage. Adult sons also oppose their mother's migration while daughters are more likely to accommodate, a gender line emerging in the positions taken. It may be recalled that areas with a high incidence of male migration in Bangladesh are known to be particularly hostile to individual women labour migration. This research confirms attitudes that are well entrenched and do not change overnight.

The government of Bangladesh clearly encourages women labour migration presently and this promotional stance percolates into the WiF programme. The NGO implementing the WiF programme denies favouring migration, yet the promotion is insidious. In weighing the pros and cons, the balance of advice clearly tips in favour of migration. Care is taken not to paint a negative image of migration outcomes and there is little interest in investigating the problems that migrant women actually encounter abroad.

None of the fieldworkers had personal or work

One of the projected outcomes of the WiF programme is that “recruiting agencies adopt ethical recruitment based on international standards and are subject to improved monitoring and enforcement.”³⁴ The study shows that recruiting agencies at source and at destination remain as un-regulated as ever. Their trade is built on opacity and make-belief methods and one must admit that little has changed in this regard.³⁵ Promoting ‘rights’ in a community-based programme while recruiting agencies carry on ‘business as usual’ can only have very limited impact.

12. Recommendations

Several activists and media personnel in Bangladesh have criticised the government for promoting women labour migration, in particular to Saudi Arabia, and for ‘selling our women’ in order to open up the market for male migration. They believe women should not be allowed to migrate in the present circumstances, given the level of exploitation. Even though ‘safe migration’ cannot be ensured, we firmly believe that one should not yield to the temptation to re-impose the bans and restrictions of yesterdays. Bans create more problems than they solve.

If women are to migrate, they should do so with accurate information and some understanding of the risks. This is why factual data are so important to share. For example, what migration ‘free-of cost’ may entail and who will foot the bill if a woman refuses the ‘work’ and demands to be repatriated. Women should be warned about this. The implementing NGOs ignoring experienced migrants has been a major mistake. These women have useful information of a practical nature to

