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(MoU) was signed between the Government of Bangladesh and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which stipulated that Bangladesh will send 200,000 women to Saudi Arabia as domestic workers over the next two years. While for women, labour migration was declared 'free of cost', the price of migration for men soared to 40 times the cost of female migration. Poor families could not afford to send their men, though male migration was the preferred option socially.

RESEARCH METHODS

The Bangladesh research team followed local trainings in Narayangonj district in areas considered to have a substantial incidence of female migration. Training sessions were conducted at the village level by the NGOs commissioned by the ILO.

The research team interviewed a cohort of female participants in the WiF programme at regular intervals over 18 months (n=40), starting in October 2015. An additional nine returnee women were interviewed, making a total of 49 study participants.

Field work was conducted in three sites to find out how the WiF messages were phrased and delivered, how they reached out to 'women candidates for migration' and what influence they had on their perceptions and behaviour. The research also included interviews of one or several of their family members (n=59), implementing agency workers, trainers and management staff (n=12) and labour intermediaries (i.e. *dalal*) (n=11). This briefing note draws primarily from interviews with the women. Findings from interviews with family, implementing agency workers and *dalal* can be found in the [full report](#).

The research focused on women's migration plans – pursued or abandoned, successful or failed, and gained an understanding of women's changing perceptions over time. Fieldwork with a relatively small and socially embedded population permitted anthropological research methods.

The relatively long duration of the research allowed the research to capture the deeply transformative effects of cross border migration revealing the ways that women's positions and identities were not fixed or 'frozen'.

Female study participants (prospective migrant women)

Ultimately, 49 women were interviewed, of whom the majority were between ages 25–34. The women's educational level was low: 77% were either illiterate or had not studied beyond primary level. Age at first marriage was also very young: 40 participants were married before the age of 18, and the mean marriage age for those who married before age 18 was 14 years old.

QUESTIONS TO GUIDE INTERVENTION DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

The research findings from Bangladesh suggest some of the fundamental questions that should be posed when designing, monitoring and evaluating programmes that aim to address labour migration.

1. What do local populations consider 'successful' versus 'failed' migration?

Findings from Bangladesh indicate that a woman's 'successful' migration is expected to fulfil two conditions: 1) earning reasonably well; and 2) safeguarding one's reputation. 'Failed' migration was generally declared for women returning earlier than planned, not having earned the expected income and/or returning amidst suspicions of having done work that damaged her reputation, specifically sex work. It is also noteworthy that when women believe their migration experience has failed and experience an uneasy return, they strongly consider re-migrating, often with the understanding that they now know what to expect and what they might accept.

Future programming considerations:

- Undertake local assessments of perceived migration risks, hopes, successes and failures;
- Weave relevant local perceptions of success, failure and related measurable outcomes into the programme theory.

2. How might quantitative programme goals inadvertently create problems for staff and beneficiaries?

effects for programme staff, participants and the reported effectiveness of the activities.

Staff pressure

Implementing agency staff were originally mandated to ensure that 32 women attended each training session. This goal was the same for all sites regardless of

walls. The research indicated that a majority of WiF participants hoped to receive practical assistance from the NGO. For instance, it was not uncommon for women to report they enlisted primarily to acquire documents to migrate. Many appeared to believe that the NGO training would offer reliable labour broker services or at least help with migration preparations that would ensure a safer migration experience.

“The best way to keep safe abroad is to entertain a good relationship with the employer, behave well, follow instructions, keep strong and patiently tolerate what one cannot change... Any work should be considered as part of the job.”

Additionally, the findings also indicated that the trainers had difficulty understanding and discussing the complex realities of female labour migration, especially the potential for sexual abuse. None of the trainers had previous experience of migration. Thus, the trainers often seemed to prefer the simple messages from the training manual: “women should not migrate with the assistance of a *dala*” and “they should obtain their visa and work permit directly from a licensed recruiting agency”. However, the women in the course strongly and overwhelmingly rejected the advice to migrate without *dala*. Women also generally expected that whether one would get a ‘good’ or a ‘bad’ employer was largely attributable to chance. Ultimately, both the women and the NGO field staff appeared to agree that the content of the training was not really able to foster, let alone, ensure ‘safe migration’. Trainers also admitted that they had little experience with migration, so were feeling a bit uncertain about giving advice, especially with returnee women attending the sessions.

“I talk over and over again about safe migration, but I know very little about this. I do not have a clear idea about the services that... [the NGO] is providing for migrant workers and what they do to ensure safe migration. Our training did not give us this information. There is a big gap here.”

Efforts to refer women to local government support schemes and livelihood options also seemed unrealistic to the women. NGO staff announce schemes without considering the reality of what was offered or could be accessed. None of the women reported being able to obtain the loans reportedly granted after following a skill training at the union level. However, women appeared to value information provided on health and female anatomy. They found this information interesting, regardless of their migration intentions.

“I know of seven women who tried to get a loan from PKB but, because of unrealistic conditions, not a single woman was able to get it.”

Yet, some of the messages seemed to be communicated in inappropriate ways. For instance, when discussing HIV, trainers used official World Health Organization language, which was not necessarily comprehensible. It also created fear, as HIV and AIDS was a frightening subject to the women. Women who had previously

migrated suggested that contraception should have been discussed more thoroughly, because of the high risk of pregnancy. A three-month contraceptive injection was reportedly administered to all migrant women undergoing government training. But for experienced migrants, this was insufficient protection.

Future programming considerations:

- Consider carefully the local interpretation of activity
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