

**Diplomacy Training Program on Building Civil Society Capacity for Advocacy for
Migrant Workers and Safe Migration
Module 4 – Summary Report
Hotel Orchard Suites, Dhaka, Bangladesh
22-25 August, 2016**



Summary Report

Module 4 of this special capacity building program was held from October 22-25th in Dhaka. There were 31 participants, drawn from NGOs/TUs/CSOs working across Bangladesh to protect the rights of migrant workers. It is estimated that there are over 10 million Bangladeshi migrant workers – with 500-600,000 leaving each year to work in the Middle East, Malaysia and Singapore. An increasing proportion of these workers are women.



This module continued to build understanding of international human rights standards and mechanisms and how this knowledge could be integrated into advocacy strategies. The focus this time was on the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) – and the particular vulnerability to harms and discrimination faced by women.

The record of the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) will be reviewed by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women in October 2016. This reporting process provides opportunities to highlight concerns about the abuses and harms being experienced by many female migrant workers from Bangladesh – and to make recommendations for change.

There are bans on women under 25 and over 35 years of age leaving Bangladesh as migrant workers – and women going need the written permission of a close male relative (e.g. husband or father). Some see these as valuable protective measures, despite their discrimination nature which prevents women from making informed choices.

Participants worked to draft some recommendations that they would like to see come out of this review process. They will submit these recommendations to the NGO coalition on CEDAW in Bangladesh – and to the CEDAW Committee.

There was also a session on the UN's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and how NGOs could engage this process also to seek recommendations on the treatment of migrant workers by Bangladesh – and in countries of destination such as Malaysia, Lebanon and the Gulf Countries.

There were practical sessions on the media – delivered by DTP alumni, Pervez Siddique and Shariful Hassan. Pervez works with BRAC and as an independent film and documentary maker. Shariful is a senior staff reporter on the largest circulation daily paper in Bangladesh. The first session focussed

on the power of video and visual images to tell stories and reach new and specific audiences – and included a video “Open Door” targeted at the role of Labour Attaches. The second media session had a focus on how advocates could engage effectively with the media – and especially the print media to get the message out and to raise concerns about the treatment of migrant workers.

There was a major focus on the recruitment process for migrant workers in Bangladesh. Recruitment of migrant workers is associated with many abuses, high costs and fraud. This can in turn make migrant workers more vulnerable to abuses in countries of destination. Reforming recruitment has become a global challenge. Tatcee Macabuag from Migrant Forum Asia (MFA) has taken the lead on these reform efforts for MFA and shared her work, and what fair and ethical recruitment means with participants.

The ILO is a UN agency that has been taking the lead in the reform of recruitment practices. There are ILO conventions on recruitment and regulation of recruitment agencies - and complementary international standards on business and human rights. Igor Bosc from the ILO regional program in Delhi shared about the ILO standards and ILO programs supporting reform – towards fair and ethical recruitment processes that do not impose costs on the migrant workers.

There is also a national regulatory regime that many advocates see as ineffective. Avenues for redress of grievances, and access to justice are very limited in practice – whether through the government or through direct approaches to recruitment agencies. Igor and Tatcee both took participants through the way the process works in Bangladesh to identify the regulatory and policy gaps.

Recruitment agencies need a licence to operate and they must be a member of the Bangladesh Association of International Recruitment Agencies (BAIRA). BAIRA is in the final stages of adopting a new Code of Conduct that will apply to all of its 1100 member agencies. BAIRA has recently elected new leadership, and senior members of this leadership team joined the program for a dialogue with the participants about the issues.

It is clear that “middlemen” or brokers play an integral role in the process of recruitment, yet they are currently outside the reach of regulation. They connect the migrant workers to the registered recruitment agencies – and usually extract a payment from the worker for doing so. The recruitment agencies could not reach out to the workers with these “brokers”. Reform of the recruitment system to remove fees from workers requires consideration of these relationships, which are often informal.

Participants also had time to continue their group assignments on developing advocacy strategies on:

- Migrant Workers in Lebanon
- Migrant Workers in Malaysia
- Strengthening and improving the work of Labour Attaches and Missions
- Preparing a parallel/shadow report to CMW.

The program concluded with a recap on the follow-up actions that needed to be taken before the next module. A more extensive report of the module will be prepared and distributed.

DTP/MFA would like to express their thanks and appreciation to all of the trainers who gave generously of their time and expertise, and the participants who were active in sharing their knowledge and experience. We thank our local partners, WARBE and RMMRU and the Swiss Agency for International Development and Cooperation (SDC) that is funding this program.