

TRENDS IN OVERSEAS MIGRATION AND ITS SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACTS: BANGLADESH PERSPECTIVE

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INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh is a densely populated country in the world with high poverty rate of 31.5 percent. (World Bank, 2013). Since independence, the population has increased a little more than double while the arable land is reducing by 1 percent annually due to rapid industrialization, urbanization and other infra-structure development. As such, the additional potential manpower is likely to remain unemployed or under employed. This surplus manpower may be trained or facilitated to work in different countries to maintain a steady pace of domestic economic growth and pushing towards poverty reduction through remittances generated by these overseas workers.

Migration is the movement of people from the country of origin or state of habitual residence to establish themselves either temporarily or permanently in another country following the immigration regulations. The workers mainly undertake temporary migration which provides an employment opportunity and improved livelihood. It helps in poverty alleviation in the rural area and improves the social status and quality of life. Moreover, almost half of the population is female who can be motivated, trained on some professional fields like nursing, housekeeping, baby-sitting and teaching assistants, etc to undertake job abroad. Less than 6 percent of migrants are emigrating from Bangladesh is women (Siddiqui and Billah, 2011).

The migration cost for overseas employment is considered to be high. The aspiring migrants bear all costs that include visa fee, medical test, agent's fee and air ticket to reach the destination. Bangladesh is the top 10 remittance recipient countries among 48 Least Developed Countries (LDC) in 2012. Migrants' remittance represents the second largest monetary flow into the country. Bangladesh received remittance about US\$ 14.2 billion in 2012 which is half of the total export, 13 times higher than the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and 9 times higher than Official Development Assistant (ODA) (CPD, 2012).

MIGRATION TRENDS AND ITS CHANGING PATTERN

Conceptual Dimension of Migrations

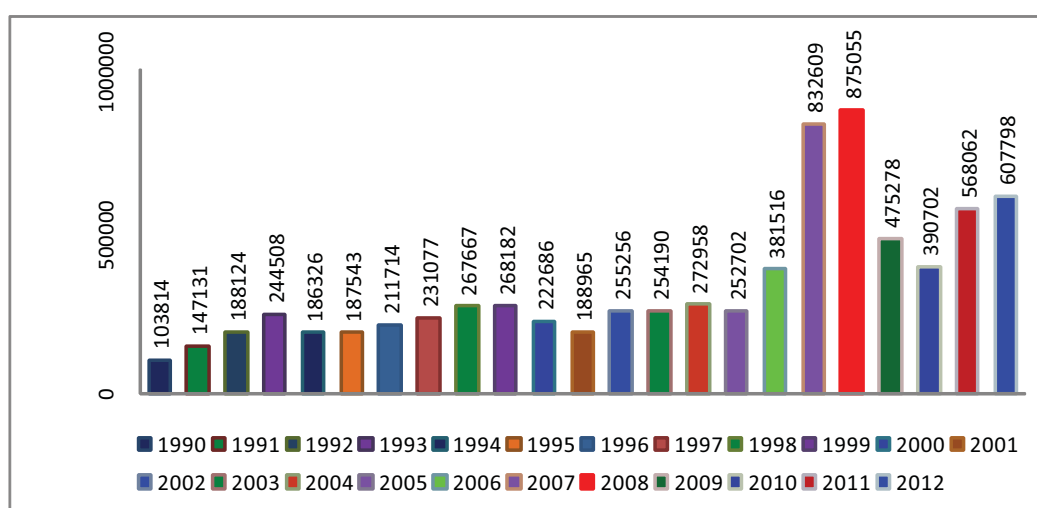
Migration in broad perspective is the movement of people from one place to another either temporarily or permanently. It may be classified into two types: internal migration where the movement confined to a single country and the

international migration that means the movement across the international border of the country. The basic reasons for migration can easily be explained by the Lee's "Push and Pull" factors. Push factors compel the people to move to new place mainly due to domestic conflict or war in the country but important factors are prevalent political turmoil, unemployment, recurring natural disasters, religious oppression, climate changes, poverty etc. Pull factors are factors in the destination country which encourage aspiring people to move with a high expectation of peace and safety, better job with higher income, better standard of living, quality education, social security, and above all political and religious freedom (Bailey, 2010:4).

State of Overseas Employment and Trends of Migrants' Outflow

The largest job market for Bangladeshi workers is the Middle East where about 75 percent are employed (BMET, 2012). A total of 83.08 million migrants have gone on overseas employment by 2012. The year wise outflow of workers on overseas employment is shown in Figure-1. A total of 568,062 Bangladeshis including 54,550 in December were employed on overseas jobs in 2011, a rise of 45.40 percent over the same period last year. Bangladeshi workers grew by 49 percent during the first six months of 2012 compared to the corresponding period of the previous year, amid declining trends in June. But finally by the end of December 2012 a total 6,07,798 migrants went abroad representing annual growth of 6.99 percent (BMET, 2012).

Figure-1: Year-wise Workers Outflow of Overseas Employment



Source: BMET, 2012.

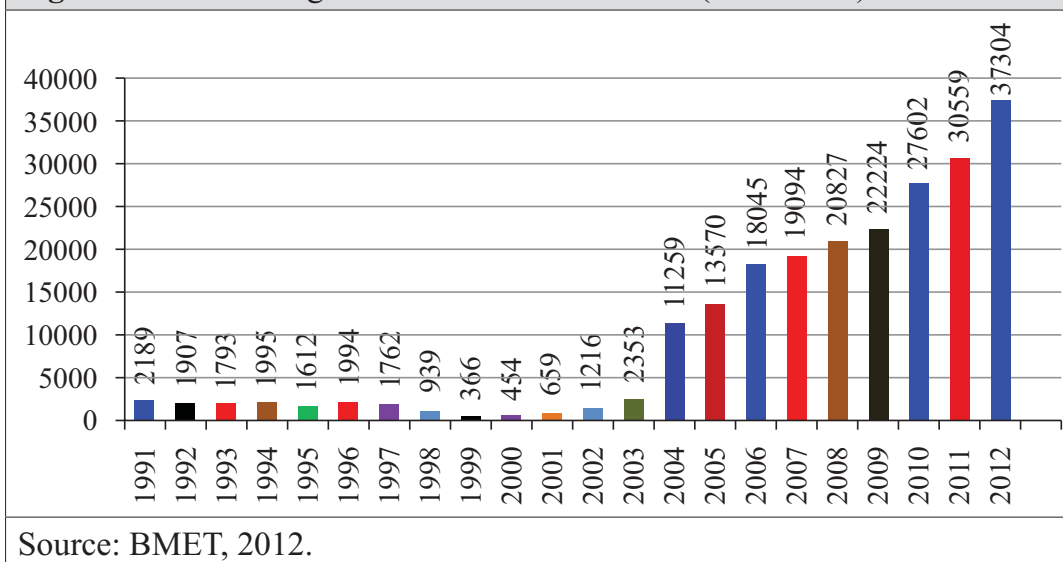
The number of economic migrants entering international labour markets jumped to 56.82 percent in 2011-12 over the previous fiscal year (Daily Star, 9 February, 2013), Bangladesh can potentially look forward to exploit this opportunity. Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS 2009) source suggested that about 5 percent of the labour force is unemployed and 28.7 percent is underemployed. An indicative projection of labour force and employment up to 2020 shows that the labour force is growing at almost twice the rate of population growth (World Bank, 1999:25).

Pattern of Regular Migration

The nature of outflow from Bangladesh occurs in two types – short term and long term. BMET categorized the migrants into four groups: professional, skilled, semiskilled and unskilled. Engineers, doctors, nurses, paramedics, IT specialists and teachers are considered as professionals. Construction, manufacturing or garments workers, drivers, computer operators and electricians are considered as skilled while the tailor, mason, salesman etc. as semi-skilled workers. The remaining ordinary people with less training and virtually illiterate are employed as agricultural workers, hotel workers, housemaids, cleaners, laborers are classified as unskilled. During the period between 1990 and 2012, about 2.21 percent of the migrants were professional, 31.53 percent skilled and 13.98 percent semi-skilled and the remaining half 52.29 percent are unskilled (BMET 2012).

Female Migration Trend

Female migration rate remained low in the history of Bangladesh. With the rapid development in the RMG sector, women workers moved out from the periphery to the urban area, but still only a negligible percent undertake the overseas employment. The mind-set of our society also acts as discouraging factor. Initially the husband and his family may allow for going abroad to work for gaining financial benefit but in most cases family does not accept to reintegrate in the family on her return to country. (MFA, n.d.). Figure-2 reflects the sharp declination started in 1996 due to government ban on female workers migrations and continued till 1999.

Figure-2: Female Migration Trend over the Years (1991-2012)

Destination Countries of the Migrants

The number and the percentage of the total migrant moved to top 5 migrant receiving countries are at Table-1. The outflow fluctuates on the basis of bilateral diplomatic relations between Bangladesh and respective countries. In 2011, the highest people representing 49.77 percent went to UAE whereas 23.81 percent of workers went to Oman and only 8.57 percent to Singapore. In the following year 2012, despite the outflow declined in the UAE but remained at top with 35.44 percent whereas percentage increased in case of Oman and Singapore with 28.02 and 9.65 percent respectively. Overseas employment data shows that the KSA was the destination of 60 to 70 percent of the workers from 1999 to 2004, but later, restrictions were imposed on Bangladeshi workers and it dropped to a meager 1.81 percent in 2010. However, slight increasing trend is observed indicating 2.56 percent in 2011 year as a result of the discussion with KSA authority (Siddiqui, 2011).

Table-1: Top 5 Destination Countries of Overseas Migration in 2012

Destination Country	Total Migrants	Percent	Position of Country
KSA	24229821	31.89	1
UAE	2211536	27.94	2
Malaysia	700622	8.75	3
Oman	642631	8.06	4
Kuwait	413617	5.86	5
Source: BMET, 2012.			

Undocumented Migrations and Labour Trafficking

The trafficking-migration nexus focuses on the undocumented migration of people across the border where the destination country views it as an anti-social event. Trafficking of female worker is often equated with prostitution. As such, the trafficked workers are prosecuted as illegal migrant instead of providing shelter and regularizing the migration process. Except the legal handling of such occasional issue officially, they remain invisible and out of the main stream of the migrant workers state of employment (Uddin, 2009:425). Point to note that BMET recently introduced ‘Smart Card’ to prevent undocumented labour migration.

Exploring New Avenue of Foreign Employment Opportunities

The recent study and report suggested reducing the dependency on few countries like the KSA, Kuwait, the UAE, Malaysia etc and exploring new job market for exporting manpower. Bangladesh should undertake a long-term programme to expand the labour market in view of the present scenario and search prospective job market. Table-2 shows the overseas employment scenario in some of the Asian countries. Primary focus for new demand of manpower may be exploited in some South East Asian countries like Malaysia, Singapore, Japan, Korea and countries of Africa such as Botswana and South Africa.

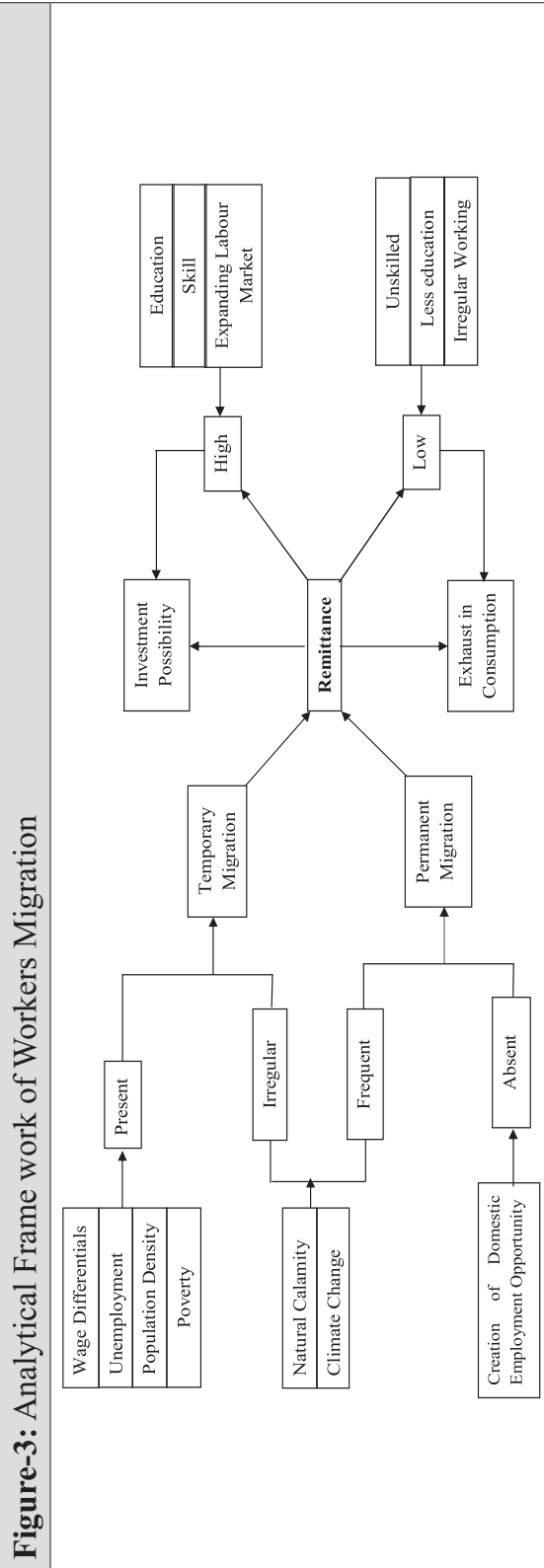
Table-2: The Overseas Employment Scenario of Asian Countries

Country	Population (Millions)	Per Capita GNI (US \$)	Average Migration in Recent Years	Migration as Percent of Population	Position of Country
Indonesia	225.3	1280.00	680000	0.30	4
Pakistan	161.1	690.00	183191	0.11	7
Thailand	64.9	2750.00	160846	0.25	6
Sri Lanka	19.4	1160.00	230963	1.19	2
Vietnam	83.6	620.00	78000	0.09	8
India	1100.0	720.00	548835	0.05	9
Nepal	26.3	270.00	106660	0.40	3
Philippines	85.2	1300.00	1221417	1.43	1
Bangladesh	140.0	520.00	381000	0.27	5
Source: Islam, 2007.					

The economist predicts that Qatar need expatriate workers and professionals to construct high-tech stadiums for hosting the World Cup Football matches in 2022. Singapore is pursuing an active and transparent migration policy to share its economic prosperity in the form of remittances with them. Bangladesh should not miss this opportunity to employ the surplus manpower (Mizan, 2012). Hong Kong will recruit 20,000 domestic workers and Malaysia has re-opened up by signing of a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in 2012. Another MoU is signed with Iraqi government to export 70 thousand manpower (Daily *Jugantor*, 26 May 2013).

Analytical Framework of Workers' Migration

The outflow data help to examine the significance of various factors that influence the dependent variable of Remittance. In Figure-3 only seven convenient independent variables are taken into consideration. Workers skill, education, regularity in working and expansion of job market etc govern the rate of sending remittances which in turn decide the factors of consumption and investment in the country.



Prevalent unemployment, population density, wage differentials and poverty directly influence the decision for short-term migration. The frequency of natural calamity, perceived climate change and absence of new job opportunities in various domestic sectors lead to permanent migration. The migration contributes high remittances depending on the migrants' skill and education. Constant nurturing of existing job market and exploring new labour market yields the higher remittance inflow. Whereas the casual and irregular working by the unskilled and less educated migrants generate low remittance. The meager earning of remittance is mostly utilized for households' consumption. Export of skilled, well trained and educated migrants can earn high remittances which provide them wider scope for productive investment.

LEGAL, FINANCIAL MATTERS AND CHALLENGES RELATED TO MIGRATIONS

National Policy and Instruments

The “Overseas Employment Policy 2006” promotes, organize and manage the overseas employment. The Immigration Ordinance, 1982 is the key regulatory instrument for administering the international migration. In 2002, the government promulgated 3 sets of rules: “Emigration Rules 2002”, “Recruiting Agents Conduct and License Rules 2002” and “Wage Earners’ Welfare Fund (WEWF) Rules 2002”. These rules are applied to regulate the activity of Recruiting Agents, controls emigration process and ensure the welfare activities for the migrant workers and their family. “Foreign Exchange Regulation Act, 1947” and “Money Laundering Act, 2002” are two regulatory instruments that controls foreign exchanges in Bangladesh. (Moniruzzaman, 2009:78).

Policy Guidelines of International Agencies

International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions generally applies to all workers. The ILO convention on the ‘Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 1979’ preserves the rights of female workers. The 1990, International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrants and Members of Their Families provides a broad range of protection and safety for migrant workers and their families. Bangladesh Government gave its consent to the ratification of the Convention on 12 April 2011 and the Government should now review and modify the national laws and reframe them in conformity with the 1990 Convention.

Cost of International Migration

The cost involved in processing an overseas migration is considered to be very high. Most of the migrants’ workers moved out to their destination country through private recruiting agencies. Now a typical migrant spends as high as Tk 0.3 million depending on the air distance to meet the overall financial obligations.

Remittance Transfer and Transaction Cost

Migrants use both formal and informal channel. The formal systems operate under the regulated financial procedure and supervised by the government agencies. In formal channel there is global Money Transfer Organization (MTO) such as Western Union, Money Gram, etc. In Bangladesh, remittance transfer takes place through demand draft issued by a bank or exchange house, traveler’s

cheques, telegraph transfer, postal order, account to account transfer, Automatic Teller Machine (ATM) facilities, electronic transfer and in kinds. In informal means, there are unregistered *hundi* dealers, individuals, friends and relatives. (Moniruzzaman, 2009:63). Usually the average time required to reach the household is 12 days and 03 days through official and *hundi* channel respectively (Siddiqui, 2005).

Challenges of Workers' Migrations

The unscrupulous recruiting agent realizes very high amount as migration cost. The poor education and training is a great impedance to undertake decent job. Remittances from the skilled and professionals are much higher than unskilled manpower. Knowledge acquired through vocational training is inadequate to fulfill the job demand. Focus on skill development training need serious attention. Occasionally migrants are subjected to verbal and physical abuse. BMET with its present capacity faces extreme difficulties in processing and management of migration. Legal support to the migrants especially the unskilled and semi-skilled workers are meager. Remittance transfer method is complicated and involves paper works. The transaction system is traditional, costly and time consuming. Although mobile banking eased up the job, it needs further development to expedite the transaction system.

IMPACT OF MIGRATION ON SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Educational Background of Migrant Workers

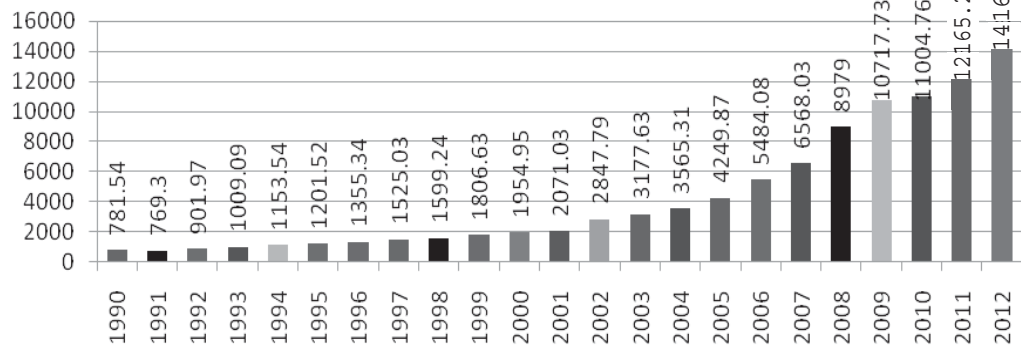
BMET and BAIRA record shows that the majority workers age group range from 20 to 40 years as they are comparatively hard working, energetic and capable to acclimatize in adverse working condition. A study report of 100 Bangladeshi workers in Malaysia shows that nearly 70 percent unskilled and low-skilled workers are qualified in secondary and higher secondary level education (Zamir, 2006:25). Only 10 percent is having university degree and remaining 20 percent possess either a little or no educational background. Most of the migrants especially in Middle Eastern countries are Muslims. About 65 percent of workers are single and almost all the married have left their family back home.

Migrant Workers' Remittance Flow into Bangladesh

In 2012, Bangladesh received US\$ 14.17 billion indicating 15.13 percent growth in compare to the previous year. It was 6.4 times higher than foreign aid and 12.5 times of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) received (CPD, 2012).

The year wise remittance received is shown in the Figure-4 reflects the upward inflow of remittances. It is amazing to see that in spite of the rapid decline in manpower export from 2009 to 2012 compared to 2008, remittance increased due to the reasons that skilled and semi-skilled workers remained employed and the simplified method of remittance transfer through official channel.

Figure-4: Year-wise Flow of Remittances in Million USD



Source: BMET, 2012.

According to United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) report Bangladesh has emerged as a top remittance recipient country among 48 LDCs. The overall position of Bangladesh is eighth among the developing countries as per the World Bank's migration and development brief (Daily Star, 25 November 2012).

Remittance Utilization at Households Level

The visible financial solvency of the migrants propagates a positive message to the society. Small sample sized studies conducted by Siddiqui and Abrar, 2003 and analyzed reports by Barai, 2012 reveal the spending pattern of remittance at household level of migrant workers. These studies and analysis divide the various uses of remittances into two categories: productive and nonproductive expenditures. The productive means the use of remittance to generate income and increase financial capacity. Only 3 to 4 percent is spent on investment in agro-based business.

Migration as a Strategy of Poverty Reduction

The impacts of remittances on the community are evident especially on education, health care, living status and housing, social security and investment etc. Higher earnings by expatriates have boosted the income of their relatives in

the rural areas, resulting in a rise in the country's per capita income. (Daily Star, 17 May 2013). A World Bank report (2007) recently linked 6 percent poverty cut in Bangladesh in 2006 to migration. The poverty profile of the poor is continuously improving particularly in the rural area. According to World Bank, in last decade (2001-2010) the number of poor people has been reduced by 15 million. (Prothom Alo, 14 April 2013).

Migration Enhance Women Empowerment

26. Women empowerment depends on the type of job undertaken in the host country. Educated working women enjoy greater degree of freedom of movement, devote themselves more in social activities, inspire others to be self-sufficient and are subject to less domestic violence. Table 3 shows migration of men empowered women to make the decision in spending and use of remittances (Ahmed, 2012).

Table-3: Decision Making on the Use of Remittance and Spending				
Type of Decision	Decision Making by Percent			
	Men	Women	Both/Family	Total
To Whose Name were Remittance Sent	26.08	73.92	-	100
Who Controls the Remittance	8.69	69.58	21.73	100
Who make the Decision on Spending of Remittance	8.69	65.21	26.10	100
Source: Ahmed, 2012.				

Mitigating Economic Inequality between Rural and Urban People

The beneficiary of migration predominantly is the people of rural area. The remittances earning is considered as an exogenous source of income. Per capita income rose by around 9 percent to US\$ 923 in current fiscal year due to higher remittance inflow compared to US\$ 848 last fiscal year (Daily Star, 17 May 2013). Migrants spend initially for improvements of their economic status and quality of life. Purchasing the agricultural and homestead land and some savings provides a tremendous boost in the economic life of the rural people and narrowing the gap with that of the urban people.

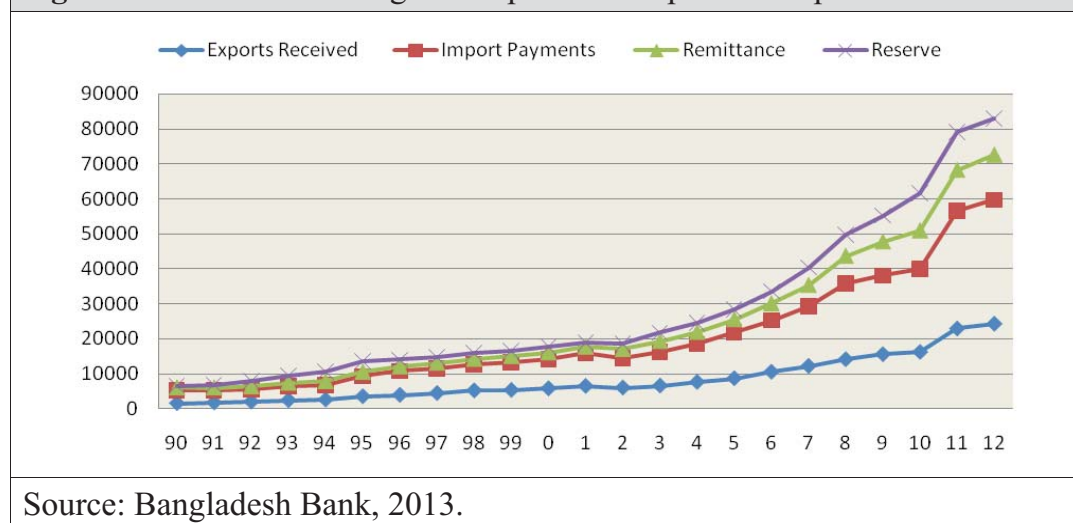
Impacts of Remittance on Economic Development

The micro-economic impact of remittances has positive reflection on the rural society and economy. A study by Refugee and Migratory Movement Research Unit (RMMRU) in 2011 showed that returnee migrants and left behind families

of current migrants in Bangladesh invested a part of their remittances in small and medium enterprises that employed 5 to 200 labourers (Siddiqui, 2011). In a separate survey by the RMMRU in 2012, it has been found that migrants spent 9 percent for meeting educational expense of children and 3 percent on medical treatment of the family members. This has greatly influenced in increasing the literacy rate to 59 percent in 2012 and infant mortality rate is reduced by 67 percent by enabling mothers to stay home and care for the newborns.

The survey of 20 broker houses showed that 10 percent of the invested capital came from remittances directly or indirectly and out of 20 shopping malls on average 20 percent finance from remittance in Sylhet (Islam, 2009). From the study conducted by the RMMRU on 2000 returnee migrants of 4 districts in 2012 proved that the greater share of remittances is spent on productive sectors. Figure-5 shows the remittance earning in compare with export and import. Bangladesh earned remittance US \$ 12.84 billion in 2012 representing 10.97 percent of GDP.

Figure-5: Remittance Earning in Compare with Export and Import in Billion USD



Remittance Inflow Boosts Foreign Exchange Reserve

Remittance is an inexpensive source of foreign exchange earnings. Since 2001 the reserve is in increasing trends and by the end of December it reached at \$ US 14.17 billion. It marked a record at \$US 16.0 billion to register all time high on 14 August 2013, which is enough to meet the import payments of about five months. It could be due to the strong remittance flow and declines in import payments. Remittance is mainly used to pay the import bill and cover up the shortfall of export earnings marking the remittances as vital lifeline (Siddiqui & Abrar, 2003).

Transfer of Skilled Manpower and Technology into Bangladesh

The returnee migrants are skilled, experienced and also owner of some savings. A central database created with the help of ILO and IOM maintained can be effective for their judicious employment to enhance the socio-economic development. The reintegration programme of Philippine, India, Sri Lanka and Pakistan may be replicated for our migrant workers (Siddiqui, 2012). The welders, machinist, electricians return from Singapore and other Middle Eastern countries may be employed in the promising ship-building industry. The returnee IT professionals can form a good working team for developing an ICT village.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Following recommendations are offered :

- a. The workers overseas migration should continue in an organized method as a national strategy of employing the unemployed youth and reduce the level of poverty.
- b. Three decades old policy guidelines on foreign employment and emigration ordinance should be reviewed to meet the competing demands of present global labour market.
- c. The BMET should be strengthened to increase its present capacity, equipped with necessary staffs and facilities for accomplishing the assigned responsibilities.
- d. Preference should be given to exporting the skilled manpower for larger inflow of remittances. The NGOs and private sector should be encouraged for imparting similar training to the potential migrant workers.
- e. Migration cost should be reduced to encourage the overseas migration and inspire the migrants for productive investment in the country.
- f. Lobbying may be used as an effective tool to build up image and expand the existing labour market in the labourer receiving countries. Research centre on lobbying can be established integrating civil society and NGOs to monitor and grab the global opportunities.
- g. Bangladeshi foreign mission may be restructured and reconstituted with relevant professional expertise from civil service in addition to the Foreign Service capable of responding to diverse requirements of expatriate workers.

CONCLUSION

Bangladesh with its huge surplus workforce will remain a manpower export franchise until the unemployment problem diminishes. The current outflow pattern of migration shows the increasing trend with some fluctuation. Scope remains open for the employment of Bangladeshi unskilled and semi-skilled workers as the native workers do not prefer low skilled jobs. For better migration management, the “Emigration Ordinance 1982” needs to be reviewed in conformity with the 1990 UN Convention on the ‘Rights of Migrant Workers and Members of their Families’.

The unscrupulous middle-men exploit the less educated fascinating people who are not fully aware about the procedure and realize unjustified high migration cost. The institutional and operational capacity of BMET should be strengthened by increasing management staffs and establishing additional 22 district offices so that recruitment process can be completed at district level. Skill development training on various trades needs to be geared up to increase the efficiency and quality of workers. Skilled and trained workers get preference to decent works with high wages leading to higher remittance earning. The existing set up of Labour Wing of Bangladesh mission is unable to address the problems of migrant workers which need restructuring with appropriate staffs and expertise.

Remittances have a multiplier effects on the economic growth, consumption and investment in the country. Bangladesh being a deltaic country prone to frequent natural catastrophe should keep this lifeline on through an uninterrupted monitoring and regulatory mechanism so that it can act as resilient during any kind of natural disasters.

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