



# MARGINALISED MIGRANT WORKERS AND SOCIAL PROTECTION





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REPORT OF AN INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP  
ORGANISED BY  
**RMMRU**  
AND  
**DRC ON MIGRATION**

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**Victoria Redclift**, a RMMRU-DRC intern, worked as the rapporteur of the workshop and prepared the transcript. **R. M. Faizur Rahman** attended to the printing matters. RMMRU expresses its deep appreciation for their efforts.

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## PREFACE

Social protection is one of the key sub-themes of the Development Research Centre (DRC) on Migration, Globalisation and Poverty at the University of Sussex. Social protection concerns emerge at all stages of migration: before departure, in transit, at destination and upon return. It impinges on internal and international migrants, irrespective of their status (regular or irregular) and also on members of their families. Quite a few research projects are currently being conducted under the DRC initiative that cover social protection issue in Bangladesh and West Bengal and by other partner institutions in Ghana, Egypt and Albania.

Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU) of the University of Dhaka, Bangladesh, a partner of the DRC consortium, organised a two-day workshop on *Marginalised Migrant Workers and Social Protection* on 8-9 October 2006 in Dhaka. The workshop mainly showcased findings or partial findings of DRC research projects being conducted; while others working on the issue were also invited.

The workshop among others attempted to address the following issues:

- What kinds of informal measures do migrants take themselves in securing social protection? How effective are these?
- How much social protection vulnerable migrant workers and those they leave behind receive from the state and other formal agencies? To what extent those are accessible?
- Is integrated (formal and informal) social protection a feasible proposition? If so, what role can various actors play (government, development partners, civil society and migrants' networks) in ensuring an integrated social protection strategy for migrants?
- Where does the rights discourse fit in migration and social protection discussions?

The workshop was attended by academics, civil society activists including migrant support groups and concerned government and development partner agencies of Bangladesh and India.

The workshop was also attended by participants from the UK, Portugal and Egypt. A volume of selected articles will be published, this publication contains the proceedings of the workshop for a wider dissemination of the issues discussed.



## MARGINALISED MIGRANT WORKERS AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

7-8 October 2006, Dhaka

### INTRODUCTION

**Dr Chowdhury Abrar**, Coordinator of the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU), University of Dhaka.

Dr Chowdhury Abrar welcomed participants to the RMMRU-DRC International Workshop on **Marginalised Migrant Workers and Social Protection**. He outlined the role of the DRC, a consortium of academic institutions from both North and South working on migration research, training and advocacy. He defined the social protection agenda as an agenda that incorporated preventive and promotive initiatives that function as a springboard out of poverty into productive livelihoods and explained that it was an issue the DRC believed to be of emerging

significance within development policy. He underscored the scope for the discussion of the link between social protection and migration provided by such a timely workshop, and explored the pertinent questions it posed. These include the kinds of informal protective measures that migrants themselves take, as well as the existence and accessibility of those provided by the family and community; and the location of rights within such a discourse. It was hoped that the cross-fertilization of ideas made possible by bringing both International and Internal Migration together as the workshop proposed was to be a particular of strength in the exploration of such questions.

Dr. Abrar outlined the first output of the meeting as the expansion of what is already an exciting network of scholars and institutions working on these issues, a network it was hoped those development partners increasingly showing an interest in field would join. He went on to explain that the second output was to be a reader friendly report of proceedings that would document not only the research examined by the



Dr. C. R. Abrar of RMMRU speaking at the inaugural session. Also seen are Prof. Ann Whitehead and Dr. Ben Rogaly of University of Sussex.

workshop but also the discussions and commentary taking place over the two days. Finally, a volume of papers that brought together research findings of the institutions and individuals involved would be published. Abrar expressed his gratitude to the exciting network of participants gathered for what he hoped would be a stimulating few days of discussion.

**Prof. Ann Whitehead**, of the University of Sussex and a theme Coordinator of the Development Research Centre in Migration, Globalisation and Poverty highlighted the timely nature of the conference in terms of the work of the DRC. She concluded that discussions taking place would prove important in taking the debate forward, and looked forward to fruitful and interesting dialogue.

#### EXPERIENCES OF A UNION ON MIGRATION

**Ms. Anuradha Talwar**

West Bengal Agricultural Workers' Association, India.

**Anuradha Talwar** began by providing a background to the substantial rise in the level of migratory movements from India and West Bengal in recent years, explaining that this rise primarily related to increasing pauperisation and the unemployment of agricultural workers occurring in the region. She highlighted in particular a positive relationship to landlessness in the area, leading amongst other things to substantial permanent migration, the constant threat of eviction forcing migrants to leave their natal villages for good. The project had therefore been able to define movements as determined by necessity rather than choice. Ms. Talwar outlined the situation of bonded labour that often resulted, whereby migrants, unable to speak the language, were incapable of paying back advances to agencies and became locked in cycles of debt. She noted that despite a range applicable legislation, the political nature of these cases created reluctance among govern-

ments to declare such people bonded, and a lack of resources prevented them from any form of escape. Young girls were frequent victims, picked up in West Bengal and taken to Delhi where they lost contact with family members and suffered physical and sexual torture. Again relevant laws were in existence but never implemented, and layers of bureaucracy as well as a negative attitude on behalf of embassy officials towards migrant labour in the region further hampered attempts to repatriation. Ms. Talwar explored a number of policy changes necessary to prevent such cases. Some of these were structural such as the equitability of the global distribution of resources, the creation of rural employment and the demand for land for workers, while others included the implementation of specific legislative tools. She concluded that greater unionisation of workers, currently particularly low in India, was necessary if this fight was to be taken further.

#### DISCUSSION

Dr Ben Rogaly, Senior Lecturer in Human Geography at the University of Sussex, began by observing that compulsion is a very important issue in terms of the developing discourse which celebrates migration but neglects the structural issues involved. He was keen to establish whether, as a union, Ms. Talwar's organisation had worked on the inherent tensions that can arise when migrant workers interact with the local labour force. He was also concerned however that the voluntary registration of workers suggested in the presentation (related to the proposition of identity cards by some quarters in India recently) could in fact create further problems for those working for a limited duration. The cost in time, money, and perhaps stigma, possibly outweighing expected benefits.

Ms. Talwar explained that although the West Bengal Agricultural Workers' Association worked primarily in source areas where there are few migrant workers, struggles in destination



locations between migrant workers and local populations have been observed. She also explained that the question of voluntary registration was more important in relation to inter-state moves where migrants were especially vulnerable (than shorter term inner state processes). She added that the project found without a union presence it was particularly difficult to ensure legislation was implemented and this would be the case for a voluntary registration scheme. In response to comments by Dr Katy Gardner, Ms. Talwar concluded the section by clarifying that movement primarily concerned individuals, usually male, rather than households, and those left behind were often hugely dependent on remittances sent back.

#### **INSECURITY AND PROTECTION OF BANGLADESHI DOMESTIC WORKERS IN DELHI**

**Dr. Tasneem Siddiqui**

University of Dhaka

Labour migration between India and Bangladesh has become a highly controversial issue; Focusing on cross border movements of people between the two countries **Dr. Tasneem Siddiqui** argued that the discourse of security is generated as the deliberate action of purposeful actors framing issues as threats to the survival of the people, state and international community. Such 'speech-acts' create the justification for actions beyond the bounds of normal political procedures, greater resource allocation for the issue and militarization; linking together social threats such as arms, trafficking and terrorism with the image of the immigrant as the nexus of all fear. The project examined the case of 'perceived' Bangladeshi domestic workers in Delhi, exploring the extent to which their migration posed a threat to the national security of the receiving country and the effect of securitisation on the lives and livelihoods of these work-

ers. It found that the role of intermediaries as a pull factor within these streams was significant. Dr. Siddiqui argued that these intermediaries (in this case 'Thikedars' or contractors) had created an informal social system of institutionalised protection that sustained migration.



The research concluded by negating many of the assertions put forward by securitising actors as to the threat posed by these migrants. She observed however that such migration does indeed pose a serious threat to policy makers, which is not addressed by the discourse. Migration in the region should be de-securitised if human security is to improve and opportunities for regular migration explored.

#### **DISCUSSION**

Prof. Ann Whitehead added that the example was particularly interesting in relation to the situation in the UK and gender issues, where speech acts commonly associate migrants with criminal activities such as sex work. Women and children are used within the discourse of trafficking to identify migration with instability and fear. Dr. Zahir Ahmed questioned the use of the term social protectors in relation to the specific case of 'Tikadars'. He suggested a broader sense of the social relations between the parties may be useful. In response to a comment by Dr. Seeley, Dr. Siddiqui noted that in most cases the employer was matched with the employee in terms of their relative status and agreed that

most migrants would never attain the more desirable positions. She agreed with Ms. Massey that very often a relationship developed between employer and employee that may be based on specific cultural loyalty, and added that in some cases workers did receive a degree of social capital from the ties. In relation to Dr. Whitehead's observation she pointed out that these speech acts create problems of trust that is heightened by the transient nature of their employment. The demarcation between trafficking and migration is thin and the project argues that migrants have to be let in legally and mechanisms are to be provided to manage this. In relation to the conceptualisation of 'Thikedars' as Social Protectors she agreed that it was an important issue, and conceded that the vested interest of 'Thikedars' did result in some exploitation. Many migrants were quite satisfied with the services provided, but Dr. Siddiqui agreed that conceptualisation of Social Protection required a good deal of further analysis.

Dr. Ben Rogaly argued that the issue of informal social protection needed to be thought about critically and carefully, and expressed concern at the use of a dangerously benign sounding label. In response to a question from Dr. Ray Jureidini, Dr. Siddiqui mentioned that all the migrants studied were in irregular status. She added that government functionaries at different tiers provided papers to the migrants and as such a good deal of corruption existed. Ms. Gigi Asem mentioned the similarity between these 'Thikedars' and the mafia, where a lack of institutional support created the necessary gap and suggested that the government use the example of 'thikedars' to improve the formal institutional system. Ms. Talwar however expressed concern that the use of the term 'social protectors' to describe these people could be used by government officials to avoid the establishment of necessary social security provisions.

#### DEGREES OF SEPARATION: SOCIAL PROTECTION, RELATEDNESS AND MIGRATION AS A LIVELIHOOD STRATEGY IN NORTH EAST BANGLADESH

**Dr Katy Gardner**

University of Sussex  
and

**Dr Zahir Ahmed**

Jahangirnagar University, Bangladesh.

Dr. Ahmed began by outlining the migration history of the region, explaining that the district of Sylhet is popularly referred to as a 'Londoni' area due to the level of emigration to the UK. The subsequent economic success of many of these emigrant families and the level of remittances invested in the region has resulted in massive infrastructural development in the region in recent years. Many 'Londoni' landowners employ caretakers and labourers to look after their fields while they are away resulting in a growing demand for labour in the area. Temporary migration to North East Bangladesh has therefore been increasing, directly impacting the flow of international migrants from the region and vice versa.



Dr. Katy Gardner detailed research conducted in Biswanath, one such 'boom village.' The research investigated the extent to which the rural poor benefited from the migration of these richer families to the UK and concluded that practices which provide the poor with a degree of social protection need to be contextu-



alised within local geographies of power. The research not only revealed that the extent to which the help of successful families could be called upon depended on how closely they were related by blood, or if unrelated, the physical distance of their natal village to Biswanath. Obligation became looser as the 'degrees of separation' widened. She highlighted that social protection has been glossed over by development discourse, without critical analysis of who receives what and what for. Although these relationships may provide some form of cushion in a broader sense, especially during times of crisis, power dynamics are nonetheless central and the patronage involved can be of a highly exploitative nature.

## DISCUSSION

Ms. Fahmida Sultana observed that the prosperity of Sylhet has been decreasing rather than increasing in recent years as many Londoni migrants have moved permanently to the UK. Dr. Gardner agreed that the boom discussed related only to pockets, and wider economic development in the region has not followed. She added that the relationship between the UK and these villages was increasingly precarious, with help often uncertain and those relying on help remaining in a vulnerable position. Dr. Siddiqui argued however that remittance sending to the region was in fact increasing but that it was important to distinguish between different forms, remittances were now largely investment based as opposed to individual.

Dr. Rogaly was keen to know whether there were costs associated with patronage in terms of the negotiability of working conditions. Dr. Gardner observed that all respondents felt uncomfortable asking for their wages and Dr. Ahmed added that longstanding relationships heightened these tensions. Significant exploitation frequently accompanied the provision of protection. Dr. Whitehead noted that it raised a number of questions about what is in fact protec-

tive about protection and what forms of sociality are being discussed. The state is a form of the social and many of these themes sit on the boundary between the market mechanism and other institutional forms. She stressed the need for rural employment creation and highlighted the wider economic context that must not be ignored. Ms. Asem noted that the ethnographic observations of the studies could be generalised to other areas of the country. Dr. Shahdeen Malik of BRAC University and Chair of RMMRU commented that Sylhet was the region with the largest Hindu population post 1947 and questioned whether caste could be playing a role in the practices of exclusion and inclusion.

## SOCIAL PROTECTION BY AND FOR TEMPORARY WORK MIGRANTS IN BANGLADESH AND INDIA AND ITS IMPACT ON EDUCATION

**Dr Janet Seeley**

University of East Anglia,

**Dr Ben Rogaly**

University of Sussex

and

**Mr. Abdur Rafique**

Independent researcher, West Bengal.



**Dr. Janet Seeley** introduced the research by explaining that the aim of the project was to explore how different socio-economic and political histories of the two Bengals have influenced the social protection provision of migrants and families that stay behind. The research attempted to assess whether or not social protection had

been provided by the state or by NGOs, and in what ways, if at all, the political regime and socio-economic context might make a difference to the migrant worker. Critically, the team were interested in social protection **by** as well as **for** migrant households, and if family members stayed behind attempted to understand how they ensured that the family survived in the absence of the migrant.

**Dr. Ben Rogaly** presented related research from West Bengal (co-authored by Abdur Rafique and Deeptima Massey - see ) that understood increasing temporary labour migration in the region as a 'reluctant choice' in the face of what can be seen as an over celebration of working class migration for work that is dirty and often dangerous. The concept, borrowed from Fiona Samuels, of 'stretched life-worlds' was used to denote the idea of people living between a number of places, often for very short periods, and developing social relations of some form in each destination. In defining social protection the problems and ambiguities were discussed. The term 'informal support' was preferred to 'informal social protection'. He explained that the concept represents a policy dilemma because in spite of inequalities inherent to patronage, it may nevertheless provide security. The research examines dramatic changes in the patterns of migration over a period of 6 years and uses analysis of the life course to interrogate these changes. Overall the '*reluctant choice*', related to the social nature of wage employment, and a lack of enforceable work-place rights, as well as the hardship experienced by those left behind. Dr. Rogaly concluded that the results highlight the negligible effect of earlier employment schemes and pensions, as well as the uneven and limited benefits from the public distribution scheme, underlining the need for more emphasis on work-place rights, and an understanding of the structural inequalities in source areas.

**Abdur Rafique** outlined a third related project that aimed to shed some light on the

relationship between migration and education. The research focused on the internal temporary work migration of adult males where the absence of the primary breadwinner had resulted in an additional load of responsibilities on those who stayed behind including children. The research investigated an ambiguous relationship; that the burden of these extra responsibilities can disrupt the education of children while access to remittances from migration can also enable families to meet the essential expenditure involved in acquiring education. The study attempted to explain how these factors operated across class, gender and levels of schooling. It found that migration had contributed to a changing perception of the importance of education as migrants experienced the problems of illiteracy, but that the cost of education especially the opportunity cost for boys remained high. As a result the drop out rate for boys was higher than girls and in many cases the grown up boys earning facilitated the education of grown up girls. It was, on the whole households with some land and more than one earner that experienced the benefits of migration as a supporting factor, strengthening the affordability of related inputs.

## DISCUSSION

Dr. Gardner commented on the value of the use of the life course to enrich such analysis, and suggested the use of the household life cycle as an additional analytical tool. Dr. Rogaly agreed that the two were importantly intertwined with an individual's migration dependent on the needs of their household. Dr. Ahmed questioned the power of place in these movements and Mr. Rafique explained the movements were on the whole from the less developed to the more developed areas. Dr. Whitehead was struck by the contrasts between these cases and her experiences of internal migration in West Africa



where movement is possibly less intricately related to landlessness, and migrants engage much more in the informal sector than the wage employment documented here. Such comparisons highlighted the specificity of empirical situations and underscored the elasticity and ambiguity of the concept of social protection. She questioned the precise boundary between rural employment, livelihoods and social protection if the language of education and rural development are incorporated within the term. She observed that it is much more difficult to prosecute a rights to livelihood and the concept therefore needs further unpacking.

Smita from the American India Foundation, argued for more definitive statistics when talking about an increase in migration, and questioned the impressionistic data that micro studies provide. Dr. Rogaly however questioned the value of such statistical and technical approaches to the field and Dr. Seeley agreed that a more nuanced approach was necessary to militate against easy target seeking so often the outcome of the blunt statistical instrument. Rogaly linked the rise, extrapolated from similar micro studies, with the declining rights of workers and their displacement in the face of new capital. He described these dynamics as a global problem that increased the importance of social protection mechanisms. Finally Dr. Gardner argued for the need to think more theoretically when discussing the push/pull and choice versus compulsion issues, and saw the concept of 'reluctant choice' as an interesting place to start. She suggested that it would be helpful to find approaches that examined structural issues along with agency, and suggested that without coming up with a single reductive definition, the concept of social protection should be honed down in some way.

**THE ROLE OF NGOs IN THE PROVISION OF SOCIAL PROTECTION TO INTERNAL MIGRANTS IN BANGLADESH: REFLECTIONS ON A VILLAGE CASE STUDY**

**Mr Azmul Kabir, PROSHIKA**

**Ms. Nazmun Nahar Lipi**

**Ms. Sadia Afrin**

and

**Dr. Janet Seeley, University of East Anglia.**

**Azmul Kabir** explained that the area studied was the Sundarganj Upazila of the Gaibandha district in North-west Bangladesh; a part of the country where over 50% of the population had past or present involvement in migration. The migration was rural-rural, rural-urban and rural semi urban, mainly male (although women engage in domestic work in towns) and the type of work varied by destination. The research found that out of the 444 households in the village, 135 received some support from NGOs but only five of these households were in the extremely poor category (of which support was received from BRAC in all five cases). The study noted that 80% of NGO members in the village were women (only 27 men in the whole village had participated in NGO activities, 17 of these with their wife) and the 13 migrant households involved with NGOs were often obtaining loans through the involvement of the family members left behind in the village. The project also found that NGOs were not the main source of loans and support. Instead relatives, neighbours and better off villagers were particularly important sources of interest free or low interest loans. Mr. Kabir concluded that flexibility and access to small, but often urgently needed funds were important factors.

## DISCUSSION

Dr Gardner asked why so few of the extremely poor were found to borrow loans and Dr. Seeley commented that it was often extremely difficult for the very poor to access such funds. Dr. Siddiqui added that the bottom 14% of the population were rarely touched by NGO credit, often only accessed through welfare programmes due to loan requirements that are based on some form of existing collateral. She underscored the need to challenge such systemic failures. Dr. Rogaly noted the role migration itself plays in this dynamic, facilitating access to credit through the improved credit worthiness migration may bring.

### **COPING WITH HEALTH BURDEN WHILE STAYING BEHIND IN MIGRANT HOUSEHOLDS: SEEKING INFORMAL SUPPORT IN WEST BENGAL**

**Ms. Deeptima Massey**

Sussex Centre for Migration Research,  
University of Sussex.

The aim of the project was to examine the experiences of 'staying behind' and the mechanisms used to reduce and manage the hardships of health burdens including the 'informal support' sought and the role of social relations. It was found that the meaning of support varied at the individual level and as such the concept of 'informal support' was used as opposed to social protection. **Massey** explained that staying behind, health problems and seeking informal support were found to be closely interrelated. Migration was seen to continue irrespective of woman's ill health and medical treatment formed a large part of household expenses. She con-

cluded that access to formal health systems was limited and women and children required basic health support, which programmes and policies had fail to provide.

## DISCUSSION

Dr. Ray Jureidini questioned the role that marriage played in such dynamics, asking whether in some senses it provided cultural legitimisation for migration as observed in other contexts. Massey explained that in this case people migrated irrespective of marriage, both before and after. It was seen as a responsibility and whoever remained was forced to adapt. Dr. Gardner added that in Sylhet there had been cases of men marrying second wives in order to have someone to look after their parents while they migrated internationally. Dr. Siddiqui noted that although the burden borne by women may be greater in these contexts, a previous study conducted by RMMRU found that in many cases women acquired greater agency in the absence of husbands and could be decisive about health provision in a way not previously possible. Dr. Rogaly commented on the need for a thicker description of what it is to seek healthcare in rural West Bengal. In the absence of husbands women would undoubtedly experience greater social dependence, however they would need more than just a husband to get to hospital. Gardner agreed, and suggested that an understanding of healthcare seeking may be enriched by greater insight into the expected roles of men and women within the process. Dr. Whitehead noted the need for clarification of the exact difference in experience between those with a migrant husband and those without, and observed that there was quite a lot of mileage in



a thick description that included both social *and* economic aspects of the experience. Asem noted that the research suggested a survival strategy may be to isolate the very sick. Massey explained that in this particular case the migration embarked upon could not be seen as purposeful neglect, it took place regardless of illness, not because of it, but the maintenance and investment in social relations was complex and dynamic. Dr. Rogaly added that the specific response of social relations was individualistic and could not be generalised. Meanwhile Dr. Whitehead questioned whether these assumptions about isolation could be made of the extreme poor and Dr. Seeley agreed that as the extreme poor are often unable to reciprocate help it is true that people are often unwilling to help them, highlighting the importance of measures of extreme poverty that do not just examine the economic. Anjali Borhade questioned the governmental health response in this community and Massey concluded the presentation by explaining that only one healthcare centre was in existence which was difficult to get to, necessitating the reliance by households on home remedies or alternative 'quack' physicians.



#### **UNWRITTEN DEBT AND THE VULNERABILITY OF LABOUR MIGRANTS**

**Dr. Ray Jureidini**

The American University in Cairo

**Dr. Jureidini** explained the purpose of the study was to conduct a statistically significant survey of foreign female domestic workers in Lebanon in order that a more statistically reliable analysis of their demographic profile, working conditions and treatment may be available. The estimated population of migrant domestic workers in Lebanon was thought to consist of 90,000 Sri Lankans, 30,000 Filipinas and 30,000 Ethiopians in March 2006 and accordingly a sample was chosen from these three population groups. The research discussed the age, marital status, religion and education of these women and documented the human rights violations, such as 13-hour working days, sexual and physical abuse, reported the migrants, for which there has not been a single prosecution.

#### **LIVELIHOOD OF INTERNAL MIGRANTS: CASE STUDIES OF THE DOMESTIC WORKERS AND THE RICKSHAW PULLERS OF DHAKA**

**Dr. Tasneem Siddiqui**

University of Dhaka

and

**Md. Jalal Uddin Sikder**

RMMRU, University of Dhaka.

**Dr. Tasneem Siddiqui** began by explaining the importance of internal migration as a livelihood strategy for many Bangladeshis and outlined the nature of the research. The study concentrated on the rural to urban migration of two groups of informal workers, the rickshaw pullers and domestic workers of Dhaka. She explained that at least half of the 2.4 million households in the city used the services of domestic workers, and that rickshaw pulling created a livelihood for

more than 4 million people. The study undertaken was an attempt to understand the nature, pattern and impact of the migration of these two groups of workers. The interdependence of rural and urban livelihoods was a significant finding of the research. Each economy was found to be dependent on the other and migrants were seen making the best of available livelihood opportunities in each.

**Jalal Sikder** profiled the sample, and the primary sources of social protection relied upon in both cases. He explained that rickshaw pullers primarily accessed credit and gained support and protection from friends, relatives and neighbors. Through these networks they were able to pay the costs of migration, find jobs, rented premises and send remittances home and having established a social relationship with their employer found jobs for other family members. Domestic workers often received some level of social protection from employers, during weddings, funerals and sickness. Whether this amounted to patronage or social justice was further discussed. Policy recommendations generated from the study with regards to domestic workers included the incorporation of such work within existing labour laws, the setting of a minimum age and minimum wage as well as unionisation. In relation to rickshaw pullers the allocation of space within the urban plan was suggested, as well as the removal of the threat of eviction and the provision of healthcare services.

## DISCUSSION

Dr. Gardner was keen to know more about the kinship links involved in the recruitment of domestic workers as well as the benefits for employers of recruiting children as young as four. Dr. Siddiqui explained that as many employers have parents in villages they often find prospective workers on visits to family members at home and Sikder added that they are

frequently so young in order to be trained up gradually and many are provided with education by employers. Dr. Whitehead highlighted the difficulty in establishing a minimum wage in cases where the range of practices covered varied so widely. She added however that it was an important issue to discuss, especially as even where well established, trusting relationships were concerned there was very often some exploitation in relation to wages. Smita agreed that the question of a minimum wage was extremely difficult in the context of countries where labour is so cheap but because there is no regulation there is much abuse. She noted that domestic work has recently been included within the category of hazardous child labour in India and despite difficulties with regards to implementation this was indeed a positive step. Dr. Siddiqui observed that similar policy amendments are needed to be pushed in Bangladesh. Ms. Smita emphasized that unless these issues were discussed in the language of human rights and labour laws no progress would be made and Ms. Sultana agreed that gifts and handouts in times of need did not reduce the social inequality between employers and employees and the focus needed to remain on legislation. However Dr. Siddiqui noted that it was important to progress cautiously, to create space for dialogue first, in order to ensure that employers could be brought on board. Dr. Jureidini agreed that it was not something that could be done instantly, work needed to be done with NGOs and embassies in developing the momentum to introduce legislation. He added that problems of policing needed to be borne in mind and that trade unions were often unsympathetic, reluctant to work with migrants who they see as displacing nationals within the labour market. He concluded that in many countries (those that have not signed the UN Convention of the Rights and Protection of Migrants and their



Families) it remains illegal to join unions unless you are a citizen of that country.



#### LIVELIHOOD AND SOCIAL PROTECTION IN INTERNATIONAL LABOUR MIGRATION: A CASE STUDY OF BANGLADESH

**Ms. Syeda Rozana Rashid**  
University of Sussex.

**Rozana Rashid** began by explaining that temporary labour migration from Bangladesh to the Gulf and South East Asia had been increasing since the 1970s, and in 2005 252,704 such migrants were recorded. As a result in the same year Bangladesh received remittances worth US \$4241.55 million. The research explored the types of social protection mechanisms that are offered by the state to these migrants and their families to minimise the risk of migration, and whether or not this assistance has worked. In cases where it has not, the study attempted to ascertain how the migrant community coped with the associated risks and vulnerabilities. Ms. Rashid explained that the study defined social protection as more than just social assistance and social insurance but as a term that incorporated all measures that involved mitigating risk and reducing vulnerability and thus protecting the livelihood of low-income families. She highlighted that although formal social protection

measures exist many are not directly targeted to migrants; all are extremely bureaucratic and are further limited by resource constraints and corruption. As a result informal social protection is absorbing most of the risk and providing most of the support, in the form of loans from family and friends, informal financial support and small borrowing from the community, marriage alliances, local arbitration and mediation (*Shalish*), as well as patronage. Extensive social networks are also developing abroad. Rashid concluded that the benefits of migration were dependent on the availability of informal social protection. Successful migrants were generally those for whom such support networks were available, as the insurance provided by the state had proved inadequate.

#### DISCUSSION

Dr. Rogaly began by thanking Rashid for providing the clearest conception of social protection so far. He emphasized the need to keep returning to what kinds of social protection were being addressed by different social protection mechanisms, expressing concern at the inclusion of private providers within the banner of social protection. Dr. Seeley agreed that the presentation was indeed very clear but she highlighted that families could not always rely on kin as had been suggested. She added that the issue of the very poorest accessing help needed to be further examined. Dr. Abrar also wondered whether any cases had been recorded of employers being forced to give money back by the *Shalish* or community. Ms. Rashid revealed that she had come across such cases, and explained that as employers were within the society they were accessible in a way they often were not to the formal legal system. She also agreed with Dr. Seeley that there were many loopholes in the provision of VGD (Vulnerable Group Development) to those that were actual-

ly most vulnerable. Sultana added that although it was true that migrants were being supported by their natal kin everywhere, the question remained as to what kind of support this involved.

**GOOD PAPER, BAD PAPER: INFORMAL SOCIAL PROTECTION AND LEGAL STATUS AMONG BANGLADESHIS IN LISBON**

**Mr. José Mapril**

Institute of Social Sciences, University of Lisbon.

**Jose Mapril's** paper examined a critical vulnerability experienced by migrants at destination, their legal status; levels of legality, or lack of any legal status leaving migrants in extremely marginalized positions. How legal status is managed, which resources are used to overcome illegality and how these resources function were explored. Immigration policies in Portugal and other European countries were reviewed and ethnographic evidence was used to construct cartography of social networks linking Lisbon to other Schengen countries. Through these networks migrants share information and mobilise resources, in order to seize legalization opportunities in other places. The paper vividly demonstrated the importance of such networks to our understanding of the vulnerability experienced by migrants in terms of documentation, the marginalisation process related to "legality". In the case studied particular immigration policies and requirements, suitable for certain economic agents, further reinforced the insecurity of several Bangladeshis in Lisbon, leaving them vulnerable to employers. However Mr. Mapril revealed how one particular interlocutor was able to utilize his social networks and his personal savings and move to another European country where his papers would provide a greater degree of financial and social security. In

this account social networks worked as a base from which to search for new opportunities, 'better papers', either through the simple circulation of information or the actual movements of economic capital. The paper described the significance of these informal social protection mechanisms in supporting and sustaining migrants under harsh conditions.

**UNSKILLED AND SEMI-SKILLED LABOUR: ACCESS TO THE UK LABOUR MARKET**

**Ms. Siobhán McPhee**

Research Associate, RMMRU.

**Siobhan McPhee** outlined the historical relationship between the UK and Bangladesh and the benefits of migration to both countries. She also highlighted the lack of existing research into labour migration in the UK and the need to curb irregular flows through education and awareness. The research sought to examine the options open for Bangladeshi migrant workers considering the UK as a destination, and to assess the faults and failures of the current system. It also attempted to establish how the relationship between the countries in terms of labour migration could be improved. It found that although labour demand existed in the UK in number of sectors this information was not made accessible to potential migrants in Bangladesh and the current complicated system was not benefiting either country, but encouraging fraud and other forms of irregular migration. She asserted that migration should be open to all, without discrimination and avenues must be created to meet the labour need. In order to do so the British High Commission could become a formal source of information on labour demand in the UK. The UK must recognise the importance of migration as a means to achieving the MDGs and allocate funds to the development of a planned labour migration pol-



icy to address the demand side of the market. A firmer bilateral agreement between the UK and the GoB was also necessary.

## DISCUSSION

Dr. Gardner agreed that the new rules were creating a class system, adding that these systems were also highly racialised. Interestingly, many Bengali restaurant owners have been reported in the British Bangladeshi press as complaining that they cannot employ Eastern Europeans because they do not have the necessary skills, highlighting the gap that remains in the market for Bangladeshi migrants. She noted that the flow is continuing but now access to the UK is primarily attained through marriage. Dr. Rogaly commented that the case of students was also an interesting issue, as in literal terms a legal form of migration but actually one that provided a substantial source of labour migration to the UK, and sometimes through enrolment in dubious schools or colleges. He agreed that the points system gave too much power to employers but suggested that this was largely related to the sponsorship requirement it involved, representing a significant incentive against seeking redress from employers. Dr. Rogaly questioned the suggestion of a failure to recognise the contribution migrants made to the UK. He suggested instead that the discourse circulated around the contribution of migrants but in a very compartmentalised and racialised way, with an almost ruthless economic rationale. In relation to the issue of students Ms. McPhee agreed on the need for a greater level of research in the area, and added that lots of migrants were saying they did not want to enrol in dubious colleges. She added that who monitored employers presented a significant problem. Dr. Juraidini noted that being able to change employment

was a critical issue, there needed to be assurances that migrants could withdraw their labour. Ms. Prasad asked whether with the integration of countries in the E.U. employers preferred European workers to those from other nationalities. Ms. McPhee explained that Europeans were cheaper because they did not require visas, and although they still required a work permit they were easier to access. She added however that people in the UK had argued that as they are European they are more like 'us'. Dr. Siddiqui added that a law was passed by the Home Office in the UK stating that in the case of doctors Eastern Europeans would be given preference and a protest among Asian doctors resulted. She concluded by outlining the contradiction within UK policy, whereby the UK was trying to develop linkages with the Bangladeshi diaspora while doing little to improve the options for unskilled and semi skilled migrants.

## DISTRESS SEASONAL MIGRATION: ITS IMPACT ON MIGRANT'S FAMILIES AND CHILDREN'S EDUCATION.

### Ms. Smita

American India Foundation, New Delhi.



Ms. Smita began by providing a background to the emerging phenomenon of distress seasonal

migration from the dry lands of India. She explained that the complicated circulation of labour that has developed is affecting all major states of the country, whether 'sending' or 'receiving', and involves a number of industrial and agricultural sectors. The impact on families can be substantial as removed from their villages migrants lose entitlements to food subsidies, health care, education for children, and citizen rights. They are forced to live in inhuman conditions, working long hours with no labour rights or union protection. She emphasized the effect on the schooling of children, many of whom are out of school for 8-10 months of the school year and often working from the age of 6 or 7. The project works in a number of the most severely affected states, in both sending and receiving areas, providing work site schools, bridge schools and hostels as well as advocacy for the abolition of child labour and for a strengthening of government provision. She concluded that bureaucratic, legislative and political neglects, as well as that of the media had hampered progress in the area and policy remained geared towards settled populations, failing to address the effect of this kind of mobility. Wealthier migrants were able to take their rights and entitlements with them when they moved, but the poorest were forced to leave them behind. With the Interstate Migrant Workman Act (1979) outdated and existing legislation not implemented there was no effective legislation for this kind of population movement.

**SEASONAL MIGRANT WORKERS AND SOCIAL SECURITY: A CASE STUDY OF INTERNAL LABOUR MIGRATION IN NASIK, INDIA**

**Anjali Borhade**

Disha Foundation Nasik, Maharashtra, India.

As one of the fastest growing cities in the India, **Anjali Borhade** began by outlining the vast increase in the level of migration to Nasik city in

recent years. Drought and a lack of employment opportunities have forced landless, less landed and lower caste groups to migrate for 8-10 months of the year working in semi and unskilled construction and agriculture sectors. In the city they face exploitation from employers and are unable to access basic amenities like water, sanitation, healthcare, education for children and shelter. Women make up 50% of the migrant population and suffer additional hardships. They are unable to command equal wages even where the legislation exists, and are very often forced to relinquish control of their income to husbands. Borhade highlighted the lack of a commonly accepted definition of social protection and used the existing ILO definition to underscore the breadth and ambiguity of the term. The ILO's social protection is based on a framework which provides guaranteed basic social support to citizens, including formal or informal mechanisms, provided that the contributions to these schemes are not wholly determined by market forces. As such the definition incorporates an extremely wide range of mechanisms, from group solidarity to government subsidies, and as Ms. Borhade stressed is nothing but social security in the broadest sense. The project has worked with migrants on a number of priority issues through awareness raising and empowerment and is involved in advocacy with local authorities and the state government to improve conditions. It has achieved a number of successes in the areas of food security, education, skill building, health-care provision and in the development of a transit camp initiative. However it has also faced challenges including a negative attitude to migrants from bureaucratic and government departments as 'outsiders' and an additional 'burden' as well as a lack of resources and a reluctance on the part of NGOs to work with a floating population.



**SPATIAL STRATEGIES AND SOJOURNER  
WORKERS: BUILDING URBAN INFRASTRUC-  
TURE IN KERALA**

**Mythri Prasad**

Centre for Development Studies, Kerala, South  
India.

**Mythri Prasad** outlined research that maps the making of urban public infrastructure in Kerala by focusing on the road construction sites of the multi national company Punj-Lloyd Ltd. The paper understood the sub-contracting that takes place, in relation to the procurement of both materials and labour, as a spatial strategy employed by capital in its process of accumulation. It analysed the role of caste and kinship in the recruitment process, as at all levels (from the role of contractors to village recruiters, and those that negotiate on behalf of workers); religious, geographic, caste and cultural ties create links and determine hierarchy. Gendered economies of space prevent women from participating in such movements, remaining in villages to ensure subsistence and the reproduction of labour power. Ms. Prasad detailed accounts from the workers that highlight the bondage created by a recruitment process ingrained with vested interests and inadequate information provision.

**DISCUSSION**

Dr. Rogaly expressed concern regarding Smita's presentation that related to problems created when generalizing about the nature of migration across the whole of India. He was uncomfortable with the picture presented of victims without agency, an image that has in the past worked against migrant populations. He was interested

however in further description of the education interventions carried out. Ms. Smita responded by explaining that the project worked mainly in the villages, setting up bridge schools for when children returned to their villages in the summer months. Dr. Siddiqui was interested in the disruption of voting rights and Dr. Rogaly observed that in West Bengal transport between villages and migrant destination areas had been organized in order to bring workers back to their village to vote. Smita commented that these schemes were only feasible for short distance migrants rather than inter state moves. Dr. Seeley highlighted the challenge involved in carrying out such projects without upsetting governments. Smita described the severe problems the project had experienced when trying to bring the government on board. It was only very gradually, after an extensive period of time and gentle persuasion that things began to change and she explained that media coverage was an important part of this process. As a result the AIF have gradually been able to involve all of the state governments in the three states within which they work, as well as other states outside their official remit.

Dr. Jureidini noted that both the project of Smita and that of Prasad discuss the displacement of local labour by migrant populations, he was interested to hear whether there had been resistance to this. Ms. Prasad explained that in the case of the Kerala road construction sector, all local workers are highly unionized and currently paid significantly more than migrant workers. As a result they are concerned about a fall in wages with the influx of migrant labour and have begun pushing for an increasing in migrant wages in order to ensure against this.

## CONCLUDING SESSION

**Chair: Prof. Ann Whitehead**, University of Sussex and DRC Theme Coordinator.

**Dr. C R Abrar** began the concluding session by expressing his gratitude to the 12 international guests and at least 20 national participants involved, for the wealth of varied experiences shared over the two days. A range of varied and interesting topics had been discussed from short-term contract workers in the Gulf to the experience of seasonal migrants in Maharashtra, from migration and health, migration and education to migration and rights and entitlements. He explained that although the concept of social protection was struggled with at first the debate was richly explored, and that beyond research based on empirical studies, theory was not neglected. He highlighted three areas of particular success as the linking of migration with social protection, the conceptual debate surrounding the term, and the all too infrequent bridging of the international/internal divide. He also considered the bringing together of both

academics and activists as a significant contribution, and emphasized the rich inputs gained from colleagues in the field. On behalf of RMMRU he warmly thanked all involved for sharing this wealth of experience.

**Dr. Janet Seeley** continued by reflecting in more detail on the conceptual debate highlighted. She emphasized that the debate was still very much a work in progress but that it had been very helpful to hear a variety of different ideas. She thanked Dr. Rogaly for providing a useful background in outlining the World Bank definition, close to that followed by DFID, which describes social protection as relating to social insurance schemes, the attainment of productive assets, employment provision as well as labour market regulation. She mentioned that he had also introduced an idea that Massey drew to our attention to when talking about social 'support' as the 'holding up' of people who stay behind and added that Dr. Gardner and Dr. Ahmed had made an important contribution in emphasizing the degree to which social protection needed to be contextualized. She noted that power dynamics were something that had been raised by a





number of people, and that social protection was not something that could be taken for granted as benign. The client-patron relationship had been widely discussed, often coming at a cost, as poor people meet different obligations to their patron in return for social support.

Dr. Seeley commented that in spelling out a number of different areas Rashid highlighted the need to look beyond formal systems of social assistance and social insurance, and that her list rang true for internal migrants as well as international. The point that social protection needed to be viewed very carefully was an important one. Protection is not necessarily social and as a result of the strings attached it can even be detrimental. Dr. Seeley also encouraged caution in what was called for in terms of policy change. While informal social protection can be held up as flexible and responsive and a model that governments should build upon, the regularization of such systems might also be the best way to kill them.

In outlining some of those key policy issues, **Ms. Victoria Redclift** noted that this caution needed to be borne in mind. She began however by signaling the discourse of rights as an area of particular significance within the workshop, having been bought out on a number of levels over both days, and including in particular the lack of enforceable work place rights. She noted that while the problems in the implementation of such legislation had been made apparent in more than one presentation, the importance of a union presence in ensuring the implementation of legal frameworks was also discussed. A related issue highlighted had been the accountability of both employers and recruiters and the question of how the diverse and complex migrant business could be more effectively monitored. In discussion of the interface between international and internal migration streams the role of the sending countries or sending states in insuring the enforcement of these rights at destination was another critical issue that emphasized the overlap in the issues relevant to both flows. Equally, the creation of transparent channels for regular migration had

been consistently called for and there was a need for this debate to be taken further. Finally much of the discussion and commentary had underscored the structural inequalities at source and drew attention to the wider economic picture that policy needed to address. Examples included the expansion of rural employment opportunities as well as the inability of the most vulnerable to access funds with the need for credit facilities to be made available to the very poor.

**Dr. Ray Jureidini** added that in relation to the implementation of legislation the prosecution of violators of rights was critical. If this was done with a high enough media profile it could serve an educative function to the public as whole. **Dr. Tasneem Siddiqui** reinforced the insecurity of marginal migrants and reiterated the necessity of de-securitisation as a policy recommendation. **Ms. Smita** reiterated this marginality in relation to seasonal migrants in particular, a group of people who became external to both their home district and their destination and **Prof. Whitehead** echoed the need to de-localise entitlements. Ms Smita added that the rigidity of policy planning, based on administrative districts and budgets that are tightly fixed, is hugely problematic and the policy paradigm needed to be altered to take into account these mobile populations. **Ms. Borhade** showed that certain initiatives in certain states can be used as a guideline for others in terms of extending and accessing rights for mobile people and discussed the joining up of programmes at source and destination. **Dr. Rogaly** agreed that these were important issues and interesting also in the context of International Migration where debates about rights across borders have been increasing. He commented that the workshop has made that connection well and noted that a lot of progress made on the internal side could be learnt from in the international context. In relation to the prosecution of violators he agreed it was important but cautioned that it could also lead to too great a focus on individuals rather than on the way in which capitalism works in different places to produce patterns of employment abuse. He drew attention to the UK where



within a governmental policy of flexible labour markets the de-regulation of capital was enabling certain kinds of labour relations to exist and exploitation to be perpetuated. He added that in understanding such processes it was important to examine particular sectors individually, as **Ms. Prasad** had done as opposed to seeking ways of knowing which leads to large-scale generalizations.

**Ms. Rashid** mentioned the need to make government more accountable and **Ms. Prasad** introduced the idea of individual accountability. She drew attention to the relationship between urban restructuring projects and labour mobility and argued that there was a need to be critical about the way our cities were changing, and our individual responsibility for encouraging a kind of distress migration. **Dr. Rogaly** took these comments further by relating them to the more general issue of consumption and individual responsibility in terms of the way migrant labour is employed in different countries of the world. **Dr. Gardner** echoed these comments highlighting the problem of those that might be displaced by these new forms of production and consumption patterns.

**Ms. Massey** questioned the interface between the formal and informal in terms of social protection, asking whether one was always drawn on because the other was not present and **Dr. Whitehead** emphasized the context specificity of that precise interface and the need to be sensitive to difference in the way in which it is discussed. **Dr. Jureidini** suggested that these discussions reflected a problem with the universalism of policy statements in general. **Dr. Ahmed** however noted that as no migration was homogenous a more diversified migration policy had to be called for. **Dr. Whitehead** concluded that although the contestation would not disappear a step towards the resolution of such issues could be found in sensitivity to different policy arenas or audiences.

In his address as the Chief Guest **Dr. Q K Ahmad**, President of the Bangladesh Economic

Association and the Bangladesh Development Council spoke about social protection more generally in the context of development policy. He described the need for protection on the part of people who cannot participate in mainstream social and economic processes, acknowledging the work of Amartya Sen in explaining that people move because where they are unable to have their rights and freedoms protected. He reflected on a gross failure by government to protect the people of Bangladesh, adding that a free market works when the government provides protection and there has to be regulatory system in place that is implemented. He thanked the workshop for addressing the real lives of the people that needed safeguarding.

The Chair of the session, **Prof. Ann Whitehead** concluded by thanking everyone on the behalf of the DRC. She thanked RMMRU for organising a workshop that everyone agreed had been an outstanding success. She emphasized that she had personally gained from the wealth of empirical material exchanged, and as



others had mentioned, concluded that the conceptual and policy agendas had both been taken forward and the workshop would be the beginning of conversations about these issues that would certainly continue.



## LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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## **ORGANISERS**

### **Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalisation and Poverty University of Sussex**

The DRC on Migration, Globalisation and Poverty is a multi-country initiative carrying out programmes of research, training and capacity building that look at the links between migration, poverty and development in order to provide the strong evidential and conceptual base needed for the creation of new policy approaches. The DRC is funded by the Department for International Development (DfID), UK. The Centre and its partners tackle specific areas of research that have policy consequences for DfID and other development agencies in the context of the Millennium Development Goals.

The Migration DRC is coordinated in the UK by the Sussex Centre for Migration Research at the University of Sussex and also has partners in the following countries; Albania, Centre for Economic and Social Studies (CESS); Bangladesh, Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU); Egypt, Forced Migration and Refugee Studies (FMRS); Ghana, Institute for Statistical, Social and Economic Research (ISSER) and the Regional Institute for Population Studies (RIPS); UK, School of Development Studies, University of East Anglia and the Institute of Development Studies (IDS)

Focussing on both internal and international flows, and a covering a continuum of movements from 'forced' to 'voluntary', the Migration DRC seeks to:

- Provide an opportunity for a coalition of partners to develop sustained and in-depth research on the key themes. Strengthening the capacity of all six partners through mutual learning.
- Contribute new insights and critical understanding of the relationship through new empirical studies as well as synthesis of existing research.
- Promote dialogue between research institutions and actors in both 'South' and 'North'

### **Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU)**

#### **University of Dhaka**

RMMRU, an affiliate of the University of Dhaka, has been functioning as a research, training and policy advocacy institution since 1996. The primary focus of the Unit's activities is on population movements, free and forced, as well as governance issues. Over the years, RMMRU has conducted a number of studies on international and forced migration. We believe that reliable and thorough research is essential to inform policy decisions. With this purpose RMMRU organises consultations and dialogues with government functionaries and members of civil society organisations. RMMRU's effort, in linking research to policy, has been well received and has led to subsequent policy changes.

Training has also been an important part of RMMRU's activities. The Young Researchers' Forum of RMMRU has been set up to create opportunities for young faculty members and students of Dhaka University to engage in empirical research. The South Asian Migration Research Network

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(SAMReN) was set up with the objective of facilitating information sharing among scholars and other migration stake-holders. As part of this scheme fellowships have been offered to academics in each of the participating South Asian countries. Several regional conferences and workshops have also been organised.

The partnership between RMMRU and the Migration DRC began over four years ago. RMMRU has received valuable support and encouragement from many distinguished experts, and funding from various universities, the British Council, Ford Foundation, DFID, UK, UNHCR, IOM, ILO and the Ministry of Expatriates Welfare and Overseas Employment.