

## REPORT OF AN EXPERT GROUP MEETING



# Temporary Labour Migration of Women

30-31 August 1999, Geneva, Switzerland

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IOM International Organization for Migration



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**United Nations International Research and Training Institute  
for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW)**

and

**International Organization for Migration (IOM)**

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EXPERT GROUP MEETING  
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TEMPORARY LABOUR MIGRATION OF WOMEN**

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## Introduction

1. The Expert Group Meeting on *Temporary Labour Migration of Women* was held at the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, from 30 to 31 August 1999.

2. The Expert Group Meeting was convened by the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) with the objective of discussing the findings of two research studies conducted by these organizations in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka and to bring in regional perspectives and experiences on the issue of temporary labour migration of women. The meeting also aimed at identifying policy recommendations as well as follow-up activities for INSTRAW and IOM.

3. The research studies commissioned by INSTRAW and IOM were conducted by the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit of the University of Dhaka in Bangladesh and the Marga Institute in Sri Lanka during 1999. The main focus of the studies was two-fold: 1) the impact that the temporary labour migration of women has on gender roles and the process of women's empowerment; and 2) how the temporary labour migration of women affects the distribution of household work and responsibilities within the families. The research placed particular attention on the impact that the migration of the principal woman in the family has on different family members, namely, the migrant woman herself, the girl child, older persons and the adult male member.

4. Five experts on female migration for the regions of Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean participated in the meeting. In addition, representatives of the Permanent Missions of Bangladesh,

Philippines and Sri Lanka to the United Nations in Geneva took part in the meeting as did representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Philippines. Representatives of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) as well as a representative of the NGO Migrants Rights Watch were also present.

## A. Opening of the Meeting

5. The meeting was opened with statements by the Director General of IOM, Mr. Brunson McKinley and the Director designate of INSTRAW, Ms Eleni Stamiris.

6. After welcoming the participants, the Director General of IOM noted that the issue of female migration has gained both policy and research attention in the international community given the increasing trend in female migration worldwide. He noted that both the International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo in 1994 as well as the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995 addressed the issue and the need to assess and regulate the situation of female migrant workers.

7. He informed the participants of IOM's longstanding involvement with the issue of female migration dating to 1981 when it organized an international seminar on the adaptation and integration of female migrants. In the 1990s, IOM carried out considerable work on the issue of migration of domestic helpers and in this regard conducted a longitudinal study on the conditions of Philippine domestic helpers in Hong Kong. It also has paid serious attention to the issue of trafficking in female migrants and conducted case studies in Austria, Cambodia, Dominican Republic and Philippines. In Thailand, IOM also



developed programmes to assist trafficked women to return to their home country. In addition to these case studies, international campaigns were conducted to raise awareness to the risks of irregular migration and trafficking, particularly for women.

8. In closing, the IOM Director General stressed the importance of this meeting and looked forward to relevant recommendations for future actions by different stakeholders in migration issues.

9. The Director designate of INSTRAW gave a brief overview of the work of the Institute and noted previous work carried out by INSTRAW in collaboration with IOM in 1994 on methodological issues in the measurement and analysis of internal and international migration.

10. Given the dearth of data on the impact of female migration on role changes and women's empowerment, she noted the importance of the case studies commissioned by INSTRAW and IOM in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. She anticipated that the meeting would help identify research/data and training gaps as well as policy options for ensuring that the migration of women contributes to their empowerment process and hence, to gender equality and sustainable development. Finally, she expressed her satisfaction with INSTRAW and IOM's collaboration in this project and hope that similar initiatives would be continued in the future.

11. The Chief of the Division of Research and Forum Activities of IOM, Mr. Reinhard Lohmann, made a brief statement in which he welcomed the participants and presented background information on the joint INSTRAW/IOM research project. He noted that the original idea was to conduct parallel studies in different regions of the world, but given financial constraints, only two case studies were conducted in Asia. For this

reason, regional experts were invited to the meeting with the hope that they could contribute their regional experiences and thereby provide a wider perspective for the research studies.

## B. Adoption of the Agenda

12. The agenda of the meeting was adopted by all participants (see Annex I).

## C. Context, Scale and Scope of Female Migration

13. This session was initiated with a presentation of the Bangladeshi case study by Ms Tasneem Siddiqui, principal researcher from the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit of the University of Dhaka. She introduced her presentation by noting that globalization has led to a new trend of increasing short-term migration. She indicated that in Bangladesh the division of labour was traditionally quite segmented and women's participation in the labour market was restricted. Notwithstanding, since the 1970s when the effects of the Green Revolution and other policies led to increased poverty in the rural areas, women were forced to seek work outside the household. At this time, female labour migration was limited to border migration, that is, to neighbouring countries. In the 1990s however female labour migration expanded to distant areas, in particular toward the Middle East.

14. The researcher from Bangladesh continued by noting that the Government of Bangladesh, with the objective of protecting the dignity of Bangladeshi women abroad, has banned female migration for domestic services. However, given that there is a strong international demand for female domestic workers, women in this skill



category are migrating through unofficial channels which increases their vulnerability.

15. She noted that because the government does not officially recognize the migration of women there is no official sex-disaggregated data on migration and therefore no data on female migration. Hence, one of the objectives of the study in Bangladesh was to understand the extent, nature and patterns of female migration in the country as well as the impact on gender roles among the various family members of migrant-women households. In this regard, officials of the Statistics Department of the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET), the office in charge of keeping records of Bangladeshi who have taken up overseas employment, were requested to manually consolidate information on the number of female migrants. For the period 1991-1998, official figures indicate that scarcely 1 per cent of overseas workers were women. For the purpose of verifying these figures, the research study used other sources to arrive at an estimate of the number of women employed abroad. Data gathered on migrants that were given compensation during the Iraq-Kuwait crisis suggest that approximately 2.8 per cent of overseas workers are women.

16. The researcher from Bangladesh noted that official recruiting agencies provide another interesting source of data on female migration. From a total of 447 official recruiting agencies, 13 send women workers abroad. A survey conducted on these agencies suggest that female migration was 5-10 per cent higher than the official figures suggest. Data from these agencies also shows that female migration was at its peak during the period 1991-1995, after which it declined due to government policies banning female migration for domestic work.

17. Recruitment agencies also provide valuable data on the occupational categories of female migrants. Given that the government has at times banned the migration of domestic workers, it is not surprising that nurses and garment workers are the most represented categories.

18. The researcher from Sri Lanka, Ms Myrtle Perera, introduced her presentation by indicating that migration for employment has been taking place in Sri Lanka since the country became independent in 1948, but that women entered the flow in 1977 when a demand for domestic helpers in West Asia began. The great majority of female migrants in Sri Lanka are in fact in the category of domestic helpers. It was observed that female migrants are not from the poorest socio-economic segment of the population. Most were not employed prior to migration, but were prompted to migrate because of the increased unemployed status of other members of the households. She pointed out that the profile of these migrant women showed that they range from 26-35 years of age and are mostly married. The fact that most female migrants are married suggests that migration is undertaken for the welfare of the family rather than for personal attainment.

19. With reference to existing data on migration, she noted that systematic data collection on migration began in 1986 and that since 1988 such data is disaggregated by sex. Official figures since 1988 indicate that the proportion of women who have migrated has steadily increased and in 1998, the number of women was twice that of men. However, given the existence of unofficial migration, female migration is underrepresented in the official data.

20. The researcher from Sri Lanka noted that the study included both households of migrant women and migrant men; non-migrant households were included as



control groups. With regard to the selection of the sample, the researcher noted that addresses of migrants were obtained from the Sri Lankan Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE) and a list of migrants who returned from Kuwait during the Gulf War. A snowballing technique was also used to identify other households in the various categories i.e., migrant, return and non-migrant.

21. Following these two presentations, the five experts presented the situation of female migration in their countries/region of expertise.

22. The expert from the Philippines, Ms Maruja M.B. Asis, noted that female migration has been taking place in the Philippines for thirty years. In the later part of this decade an average of 600,000-700,000 workers were deployed annually by the Philippines. An estimated 60 per cent of workers migrating from the Philippines are women. Most female migrants are young (age group 20-29), unmarried and fairly educated. In fact, approximately 50 per cent of female migrants have some college education and 25 per cent have completed a college degree. As in the case in other regions, notably Latin America and the Caribbean, international migration is usually preceded by rural to urban migration.

23. Labour migration of women is both temporary and largely concentrated in reproductive work. Their concentration in this labour segment, which is invisible, unprotected and isolated, has given rise to numerous problems. As early as the 1970s and 1980s there was evidence of the kinds of problems that migrant women encounter in the workplace. Because of this, the Government of the Philippines has periodically tried to ban the deployment of domestic helpers and entertainers with the hope of putting a stop to incidences of abuse of migrant women workers (1982 ban

on Saudi Arabia, which has been withdrawn; general ban in 1987-88 and a 1995 ban on Singapore). However, given that this measure prompted unofficial migration, the bans have been lifted and the Government has instead instituted various measures to protect migrant women workers. The institutional and legal frameworks for these protective measures have already been established in the Philippines. It is one of the eleven countries that has ratified the Convention to Protect the Rights of Migrants and Members of their Families, but nine more signatories are required for it to be enforced. She noted that given the lack of regional human rights instruments in Asia, national legislation is very important. In terms of legislation, the major development is the Migrant Workers and Overseas Philippine Act of 1995, which sets the premise for the protection of migrant workers. This law however is currently under review, particularly those components that concern de-regulation.

24. She noted that bilateral agreements, although difficult to establish, provide another means to protect migrant workers. When countries of destination are reluctant to establish bilateral agreements, labour agreements and memoranda of understanding can be established. Strategies and programmes such as pre-departure orientation seminars and the establishment of gender-sensitive Labour Attachés and Welfare Officers in countries of destination have proven to be particularly useful for overseeing the situation of migrant workers. Pioneering efforts have also been undertaken by NGOs, such as pre-departure orientation seminars. These have subsequently been institutionalized by the government since 1983. NGOs however, continue to play an important role in these activities.

25. One area in need of further attention is the reintegration of return migrants. Part



of the reason why this issue is neglected is that in many cases re-migration takes place thereby making it difficult to identify instances of reintegration. However, if reintegration schemes are not developed, re-migration will continue to be the only viable option for many return migrants. One problem is that the skills acquired during migration are not valued in the origin country.

26. Concluding her presentation, the expert from the Philippines indicated that there are many aspects of migration in need of further research: the psychology and culture of migrants; informal and invisible ways in which women help themselves, particularly in the country of destinations; and indicators of migrant women's empowerment.

27. The expert from Lebanon, Ms Amal Dibo, noted that there are no official figures on the number of Sri Lankans working in Lebanon. Unofficial figures, however, suggest that approximately 60,000 Sri Lankans work in Lebanon and that 70 per cent of them are women working as domestic helpers. Most Sri Lankan migrants initially migrate through legal channels. However, recurrent migrants normally migrate through personal contacts and contracts and are hence unprotected and at the mercy of employers.

28. On the other hand, migration through recruiting agencies does not necessarily work to the benefit of migrants. Agencies are mainly concerned about employer satisfaction and pay little attention to whether the employee is satisfied or not.

29. She said that while there are many negative experiences with regard to the human rights of migrants, there are also many examples of positive experiences. Employers often try to assist domestic helpers by providing them with higher

salaries than that stipulated by recruiting agencies and buying them gifts of gold. There are cases of domestic helpers who have started their own businesses. These women buy used clothes to re-sell to other Sri Lankan migrants who have few opportunities to go out of the houses where they work.

30. She noted that the only sectors in Lebanon that really care about migrant workers are the NGOs and the media. Student groups are also very interested.

31. The expert from Lebanon noted that one issue worthy of attention is the interracial attitudes developing between Lebanese children and youths and Sri Lankan migrants who, as domestic helpers, are raising this generation of Lebanese.

32. The expert from France, Ms Mirjana Morokvasic, noted that migration research in Europe has been largely gender-blind and although a significant number of migrant women participated in industrial work during the "guest worker" period of the 1950s, they were considered as "family" or dependents to male migrants. However, it was noted that even when women migrated as family dependents or in reunification schemes, they often entered the labour market as well.

33. She noted some recent trends in female migration in Europe such as: a) diversification of causes of migration i.e., migration due to conflict, ethnic and political instability rather than for purely economic motives; b) the emergence of new destination countries, such as those in southern Europe; c) the emergence of new origin countries, such as those in Eastern Europe; d) increase in skilled migrants and incidence of 'de-skilling' through migration; and e) the tightening of entry procedures in Europe and the increase in illegal migration.



34. The expert from Spain, Ms Laura Oso, noted that during the last decade Spain has become a receiving rather than a sending country. Prior to 1982, immigration to Spain was mostly from developed countries, for the most part Europeans retiring to Spain. This migration trend was gradually replaced with immigrants from developing countries. Since 1992, migrant chains have entered Spain from selected countries, namely, Dominican Republic, Morocco, Peru and Philippines. These immigrants are younger, mostly single and economically active in their countries. These immigrants also include a great number of women migrating on their own for employment purposes. While most of the migrants from Morocco are men, immigration from Latin America and the Philippines is highly feminized. For example, 85 per cent of the Dominicans and 70 per cent of Ecuadorians with work permits in Spain are women.

35. The entrance of Spanish women into the skilled-labour market has created a demand for domestic helpers and it is in this sector that most female migrants (approximately 76%) are employed. Among the middle class, the employment of foreign domestic helpers is a way of dealing with the "double working day", while among the higher class it is a means of maintaining their social status. Therefore, female migration in Spain is the result of the strategies of different social actors and the need to fill the vacuum of social reproduction tasks. On the other hand, female migration is also the result of the strategy of households of women in developing countries by which they have to assume the role of the main breadwinner. Therefore, migration must be examined from the point of view of different social actors (migrants, State, employers, etc.) in both the sending and receiving countries. Likewise, the implications of migration on the various actors must be analyzed.

36. The Spanish Government has fostered inflows of female migrants, particularly domestic helpers, through a quota policy based on demand which was established in 1993 in an attempt to regulate the migration flows.

37. The expert from Denmark, Ms Ninna Nyberg Sørensen, spoke about her research on Dominican migration. During the mid-1980s she carried out research on female migration from rural areas to the Free Trade Zones (FTZ) in the urban areas. In the period 1990-1994, she looked at how rural-urban migration led to international migration, namely to the United States. She carried out multi-local research in the Dominican Republic and United States of America, focusing on the different kinds of migrants (skilled and unskilled) and on transnational relations. More recently she has looked at Dominican and Moroccan migration to Europe, in particular to Spain, and at how their migration affects development in both sending and receiving countries. Her study focused on transnational linkages and their implications for development. Linkages at the individual or household levels are significant and have been well documented in terms of the remittances that help individual households survive. Other networks have been less studied but are equally important. For example, migrant organizations in receiving countries can have an impact in the establishment of organizations in sending countries which can assist in training of potential migrants, assisting returning migrants, etc. Another type of transnational network is the business network of small-scale enterprises. Similar kinds of businesses are established by different migrant groups in their respective countries, in this case Dominican Republic and Morocco.

38. She further noted that it is significant how migration flows shift globally depending



on the circumstances and policies of receiving countries. While prior to 1990, Dominican migration was mostly to the United States, during this decade Dominicans sought new destinations due to visa policies and restrictions in the United States and the possibility of gaining entrance into other countries, for example, Spain.

39. She observed that the concept of migration limits our views of the processes that are currently taking place. The concept of "mobile livelihoods" best represents the way in which individuals are moving at different stages of their lives and in response to local and international factors. She also pointed out that the distinction between refugees and migrants should not be too strict given that many refugees become migrants in their own right.

40. The expert from Nigeria, Ms Alice Afolayan, referred to new forms of temporary migration of women in Nigeria that have emerged as a result of structural adjustment programmes enforced in 1986. Traditional short-term "trading" migration has continued along neighbouring countries in the West African Coast, but women are also migrating longer distances to places such as Hong Kong, Taiwan and even Scandinavian countries where they purchase goods (e.g. clothes, frozen fish, etc.) which they then sell at home.

41. One new trend in temporary labour migration of women in Nigeria involves skilled women (e.g. paramedics, nurses, and medical doctors) who migrate on short-term contracts to Middle Eastern oil producing countries, United States of America and the United Kingdom in search of better working conditions and higher income. In these countries, skilled migrants can earn in one month what it would take three years to earn in their countries. However, she noted that women working in

some Middle Eastern countries are often subjected to religious sanctions applied against women in these countries.

42. Another trend involves the temporary migration of women to work as domestic helpers and prostitutes. During the oil boom period in the 1970s and 1980s, Nigeria was a destination country for domestic helpers from the neighbouring countries of Benin and Togo. In recent years, however, because of declining currency value, the trend has reversed and female Nigerians now leave the country to work as domestic helpers abroad, particularly in Europe and United States of America. The manner in which these women are recruited is a matter of concern, given that recruitment agencies charge exorbitant fees and subject women to dangerous situations and trafficking. Because of stricter border controls in receiving countries leading to greater difficulty in crossing borders, trafficking fees have increased. Families take the decision to send their daughters abroad with a view to earn money for the family. Women are also being used by drug traffickers to carry cocaine to different countries.

#### **D. Economic benefits and shortcomings of female labour migration**

43. The researcher from Bangladesh, Ms T. Saddiqui, explained that in order to understand the economic benefits or shortcomings of migration it is important to distinguish between the impact on the migrant woman herself and the impact on the family. Migration is often part of a family survival strategy and, therefore, the economic benefits need to be looked at in terms of the family rather than the migrant woman herself. It is also important to note that benefits and shortcomings cannot always be considered either positive or negative and that in her analysis she considered mixed economic outcomes.



44. The indicators used for determining a positive economic outcome of migration were: a) reasonable length of stay abroad; b) reasonable flow of remittances; c) cost of migration recovered; d) purchase of land or house; e) use of savings for economically gainful activities; f) substantial improvement in standard of living; and g) increase in income.

45. Out of 200 female migrants interviewed, 60 per cent had experienced positive economic gains from migration, 34 per cent had mixed results and 6 per cent suffered negative results. The study found that it took approximately one year's earnings for migrants to pay off the cost of migration. Given that the average length of stay of migrants is 3.2 years, the earnings of two years constituted the net savings used to buy assets, particularly gold.

46. In most cases, there was a considerable flow of remittances that were mainly used for the following purposes: consumption/health care/education (55.6%); loan repayment (18.5%); financing migration of other family members (4.2%) social ceremony and dowry (4.6%), land purchase (3.3%); and home construction and repair (1.8%). In some cases, remittances and savings were used for conspicuous consumption by extended family members.

47. With regard to savings, only 7 per cent of the remittances of female migrants was saved. Nurses are the category of migrants who were found to save the most. For other types of female migrants, it was observed that the status of savings is not secure given that families have easy access to the accounts. It was also noted that dowry is an unfortunate practice that has emerged since the 1970s. It is also one important motivation for the migration of women in Bangladesh and for unproductive spending of migrants' earnings.

48. Negative economic outcomes resulted from: a) non payment of salaries; b) contract substitution by which the migrant worker had to work by piece meal, which leads to excessive work in order to earn a decent income; c) non delivery of remittances due to informal channels; and d) misuse of remittances by extended family members.

49. Most migrant women are able to pay off the loan they took out for migration. Those who cannot repay their loan end up in a very precarious and difficult situation and often cannot even stay at their home given that the moneylenders, often NGOs, seek them out. Channels for sending remittances are informal and as a result, remittances do not often reach the family.

50. A major question regarding the positive economic impact of migration is the sustainability of economic gains. It was noted that only 36 out of one the 150 migrants interviewed obtained employment upon their return. As for the others, the study found that upon return, savings were used for subsistence (namely, education and health care for the family members) and that the migrants expected to migrate again upon depletion of these savings.

51. In the case of Sri Lanka, the researcher, Ms Myrtle Perera, indicated that most of the female migrants did not earn income prior to migration. Therefore, female migrants were contributing to the family income for the first time. In the case of single mothers, the income from employment abroad was particularly significant as it provided the only means of subsistence for the family.

52. With regard to savings and remittances, the study found that male migrants were able to save much more than female migrants. Not only did male migrants earn more than females migrants because



of the skilled work that they do, but males also had more control over their income. While male migrants only remitted half of their earnings, females sent most of their earnings back. Furthermore, while the wives of male migrants made better use of the remittances received, the husbands and other family members used the remittances of the female migrant less wisely.

53. The study also found that asset ownership had increased due to both female migration and male migration. However, while males had a better asset base prior to migration, the asset base of females was acquired mainly during migration. Important assets are: house and home improvement, land, television, radio and furniture. Gold is another asset which has a double attraction as it is used both as an ornament and as a source of emergency funds. Twelve per cent of female migrants had invested in small enterprises such as retail trade, animal husbandry, brick making and money lending. Female migrants also invested in the education of children and paid courses in vocational training.

54. A minority of the female migrants had suffered economic setbacks due to migration. In a few cases, female migrants did not complete their contracts due to heavy workloads, sexual abuse or other reasons and would flee without pay. Not being able to repay their loan, they found themselves in a worse position than before they left. Another factor that limits the economic gains from women's migration is when the husband of female migrants stops working. In these cases, the female migrant is unable to save or make meaningful investments given that all her earnings are used for household consumption. Likewise, it was found that poor management of remittances affected the economic success or failure of the migration experience.

55. The presentations of the research findings were followed by a general discussion of the experts and participants. A representative of the Permanent Mission of Bangladesh, Mr. Shahidul Haque, noted that in addition to economic motives, many Bangladeshi migrate due to environmental factors. He mentioned that Bangladesh is in the midst of a very paradoxical situation given that, while they need to allow women to migrate for gainful employment abroad, there is no mechanism to ensure the dignity and protection of migrant women. There was need for a better protection of migrants abroad, but the international legal instruments guaranteeing the respect of the migrants' rights were not yet in force. He expressed hope that the experts would be able to address this issue.

56. A representative of the Foreign Ministry of the Philippines, Ms R. Limjuco, noted that the most important issue is that of violence against migrant women and in this regard made the following proposals: a) an effective and credible punitive systems of government of sending and receiving countries should be established as a means of curbing the occurrence of trafficking and illegal recruitment of women; b) civil society's participation should be encouraged in developing and implementing appropriate measures in the campaign on violence against women migrant workers by supporting innovative partnerships among public agencies, business sectors and NGO; c) the efforts of governments should be supported to further reinforce role of women in economic development and integrate women's rights into various bilateral and multilateral fora which provide ideal venues to obtain support for the integration of women migrant workers into mainstream activities and agenda of member countries; d) concerned governments should be encouraged to development specific approaches to addressing violence against women migrant



workers and to and allocate appropriate resources or research studies, particularly gathering sex-disaggregated data aimed at providing a more comprehensive review of data; and e) the use of new information technologies that are now being utilized for pornographic purposes targeting women and children should be monitored.

56. Another representative from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Philippines, Ms L. Salcedo, noted that in the absence of bilateral agreements, the Philippines has held consultations with various countries in Asia and the Middle East, including Saudi Arabia, which receives the largest number of registered Philippine workers. Given the importance of providing potential and future migrants with adequate information, the Government of the Philippines offers pre-departure and pre-employment seminars.

57. In the discussion that ensued, several participants agreed that economic gains and social gains must be examined together. Even when household income has increased, social gains may be limited. For example, the de-skilling of women represents a significant social loss which should be given attention. Furthermore, given that the main push factor is the family, one needs to question whether migration actually empowers women. In many cases, sexual violence occurs in the family while the woman is abroad. This is another social cost that needs to be addressed. It was also noted that in considering the social costs of female migration, three types of requirements need to be considered: prevention, operational and post-migration (e.g., healing process to those affected by trauma and reintegration into society).

58. The expert from the Philippines, Ms M. Asis, observed that one usually looks at the economic impact of migration in the country of origin, while there is an equally important need to recognize the economic

impact on receiving countries. As a result of such analysis, receiving countries would perhaps be more accommodating to migrant workers. She elaborated further with the example of migrant women assisting in reproductive work, thereby allowing women in the host country to take employment outside of their home. The positive economic impact of this situation has scarcely been recognized.

59. Another participant noted that the ageing of European populations will create a demand for foreign female workers for care-related tasks. Therefore, push and pull factors need to be re-examined within a new theoretical framework.

60. With regard to irregular migration, the expert from Spain, Ms L. Oso, noted that it is very difficult to measure and estimate the extent in a given country. Rather than attempt to quantify irregular migration, it is more important to look at the profile of irregular migrants. She informed of research that has been done in Spain on processes of regularization. By examining the work permits of regularized migrants, the profile of irregular migration could be understood. Furthermore, she noted that the economic benefits and shortcomings must be analyzed from the points of view of different actors. For example, irregular migration is beneficial for the economy in Spain, specifically employers, because of low salaries. However, this same factor is not beneficial to migrant women.

61. In response to a comment made by the representative of Sri Lanka to the effect that most Sri Lankans in Europe are economic migrants, the expert from Denmark, Ms N. Sørensen, noted that categories of migrants must not be taken at face value. She noted that many migrants gain entry only as refugees when in fact their main motive may be economic. Therefore, there is a need to look at the



personal histories of migrants in order to understand the reasons for migration. Although categories are important because they define the kind of protection that migrants are entitled to, they do not necessarily reflect neither economic nor political realities.

#### **E. Social benefits and shortcomings of female labour**

62. The researcher from Sri Lanka, Ms M. Perera, summarized the social benefits derived from migration as follows: a) improvement of quality of life in housing conditions through possibilities to install electricity, water and sanitation facilities and purchase of kitchen equipment; b) possibilities to invest in the education of children and general health care services for the family; c) the emergence of a closer bond of the extended family through increased involvement of extended family members i.e., grandparents in helping those left behind; d) closer bond of the nuclear family after the return of the migrant woman; e) improvement in the status of the daughter for marriage and getting a "better husband"; and f) the possibility to redeem the mortgaged property.

63. With regard to the negative aspects, the following were noted: a) young children were emotionally affected by the absence of the mother; b) many husbands found it difficult to perform household duties left for them to manage and the risk for alcoholism increased; c) because of the workload girls faced at home they often had to sacrifice their education or career; and d) there was an increased workload for elderly family members who had to care for small children.

64. With regard to the social impact of migration, the researcher from Bangladesh, Ms T. Saddiqui, pointed out that the issues

are very complex and must be examined closely. In the case of Bangladesh, the findings of the field research did not confirm that the education of girls would be particularly affected by the mother's migration and an increase in household work. There was not, in fact, much difference between the dropout rate of girls (11%) and boys (10%). However, it was noted that the reasons for dropout among those girls and boys differed. While an increase in household work did affect the dropout rate of girls, boys discontinued their studies more because of the lack of discipline imposed by the families. On the other hand, many informants pointed out that an improvement in the quality of the education would not have been possible unless the woman had migrated.

65. Another impact of female migration is on age of marriage. In the absence of the mother, the care of adolescent girls was found to be particularly difficult. Marrying girls at an early age was resorted to as one of the convenient ways of solving the problem. In some cases, boys were also married off early but for a different reason: either to bring another woman into the household who could assist with house work or to ease the burden off the extended family members taking care of younger siblings in the household.

66. There are some extreme instances in which the children of migrant women became involved with drug addiction and criminal gangs and women often blamed themselves for this. However, it was pointed out that children of non-migrant women also become addicted to drugs thereby detracting from the accuracy of this perception.

67. Referring to the increased workload for elderly family members, the researcher from Bangladesh said that there was need to find out how the elderly family members



could be supported with their increased responsibility during women's migration.

68. The expert from Denmark, Ms. N. Sørensen, cautioned that the family should not be taken as the only unit of analysis when looking at benefits and shortcomings of female migration. Rather the scope should be broadened to include local communities, countries and regions. She also noted that in some cases, NGOs and local groups play a very significant role in supporting migrant women, particularly single women with children. She observed that in the Caribbean the first women to migrate were those who were involved in NGOs. As a result, NGOs represent a social formation which in some cases replaces the family and in some cases promotes migration.

69. The expert from Spain, Ms L. Oso, indicated that there are three factors that influence whether a woman will derive benefits and shortcomings from migration. These factors are: a) the position of the migrant women in the migratory cycle, that is, whether one takes the point of view of the migrant woman in the receiving country, or from the point of view of her family, or of the migrant woman upon her return; b) marital status of the migrant woman; and c) whether the woman's migration was an individual endeavour or part of a family effort and strategy.

70. A representative of the Foreign Ministry of the Philippines, Ms L. Salcedo, agreed with the previous comments related to the need to expand analysis beyond the household. It is important, she noted, to look at the positive and negative impact of women's migration on the receiving country. Among the negative impacts, it is important to point out that the trend in female migration is exacerbating the low regard for women's work because it is seen as easily accessible and cheap. In this regard, there

is a strengthening of gender and class stratification. On the positive side, the migration of women has the effect of fostering international harmony and unity. She noted that in the case of Philippine domestic helpers in Singapore there is evidence from a recent survey that suggests that children in Singapore are becoming more understanding of the plight of poor people.

71. Other participants agreed that the impact of migration in receiving countries is significant and should be the subject of more study. The social and cultural changes taking place due to the mixing of cultures, particularly in issues related to intermarriages and the rights of the children is very important. The researcher from Bangladesh, Ms T. Saddiqui, added that internationalization is also taking place among migrants in receiving communities where they establish bonds and migrants associations.

72. The Director designate of INSTRAW, Ms E. Stamiris, expressed that more qualitative research on migration is required, particularly on those cultural changes resulting from the encounter of different customs, religions and beliefs.

73. The expert from the Philippines, Ms M. Asis, pointed out the need to be methodologically cautious in distinguishing what may be short-term from long-term impacts of migration. She also drew attention on the differing ways in which women and men react to migration of the spouse. Studies conducted by United Nations University (UNU) in various countries in Asia have shown that when men migrate the women usually "endorse men's duties". Although this can be interpreted as a broadening of the female role, it is also true that it implies additional responsibilities and burden for the women left behind, particularly if there is not



sufficient support from the larger society to help them cope with their new responsibilities. When women migrate, however, it is usually other female members of the family, rather than the men, who take over the responsibilities left by the migrant.

74. It was also expressed that the dignity of women's labour should be recognized by the receiving country given that migrant women risk everything, including the well-being of their families.

75. The session concluded with various participants agreeing on the need to conduct research, both in receiving and sending countries, in order to have a global view and a more thorough understanding of the complex processes taking place.

#### F. Empowerment of Female Migrants

76. The researcher from Sri Lanka, Ms M. Perera, began this session by pointing out that the concept of empowerment needed further clarification and definition. As to the presentation of her study results in this domain, she drew attention to another supporting concept, that of "role strengthening".

77. In the Sri Lankan study, the following indicators of migrant women's empowerment in their migration process were examined: a) *decision making*, whether there was an increase in women's participation in decision making during and after migration; b) *division of labour*, whether men assumed household tasks previously assumed women and whether this was maintained after the migrant women's return; c) *perception of women's new economic role*, whether women's economic role was recognized by the migrants themselves and others; and d) *self confidence*, whether women acquired a sense of self worth and strength.

78. With regard to decision making, she noted that female migrants had made significant inroads into areas that were typically male preserves, such as housing. It was noted, however, that wives of male migrants had also acquired significant decision-making power in traditionally male areas such as housing and purchasing land and furniture. In the case of female migration, there was a clear increase in joint decision making. Whereas before migration males made certain decisions on their own, during and after the migration of women, the latter had a greater say in most household matters. It was also found that most women expressed satisfaction with their newly acquired power and role in decision making.

79. The inroads that migrant women had made in terms of decision making, however, were not commensurate in that concerning the household division of labour. It was found that tasks carried out by female migrants prior to migration were later assumed by husbands, daughters and parents. However, upon the return of female migrants these tasks reverted back to her. There was a slight increase in sharing of tasks between the husband and wives upon the return of female migrants, particularly in those areas where the housework was made easier by the use of acquired household equipment and utensils. It was noted that even though migrant women assumed their reproductive role within the household upon their return, housework was highly facilitated by the improved household technologies and therefore, women found more time for leisure and for engaging in small enterprises.

80. The migration process gave migrant women an atypical provider role. In most cases their economic contribution was highly appreciated and recognized, particularly in those cases where the migrant woman was the sole provider. It



was noted that children changed their perception of their mother's role in the family and in some cases considered her to be the "saviour" who had permitted them to have better education and greater material benefits. The wealth that women had obtained through migration also made it possible for them to give generously to brothers, sisters and friends. This new role of benefactor gave the women satisfaction and empowerment. The acquisition of gold by most migrant women also provided them with a certain sense of empowerment as it was an independent asset which they could use as they saw fit. It was also found that migration allowed women who were trapped in unhappy family relations, to move themselves and their children out of unhealthy family environments.

81. Finally, migrant women acquired strength and empowerment even in those cases where the experience had not been successful. In those unsuccessful cases, women had the courage and strength to repeat migration until they had gained satisfaction for themselves and their families.

82. Migrant women also showed their acquired sense of self worth by disregarding comments made by the community regarding the way they dressed or behaved. They had accepted and were proud that migration had made them different persons.

83. With regard to daughters, it was found that daughters who were left behind become very strong in character; they received the mother's money, continued education, managed the household, and sometimes dealt with an alcoholic father. Elderly women assumed a renewed role in the family, but sometimes fell ill towards the end of the long periods of migration.

84. In noting some of the negative aspects or consequences of migration, the

researcher from Sri Lanka noted that ensuring a smooth process of migration (e.g., safe work environment, security and protection with a system that respects human rights and regulates the terms and conditions of work) provides a greater opportunity for "role strengthening" and empowerment, even in cases where the migration experience was not completely successful. She concluded by stating that our goal is to ensure "migration with a human face".

85. Reporting on the Bangladeshi study, Ms T. Saddiqui noted that migration can empower women by exposing them to an independent decision-making process. At the same time, however, migration exposes them to increased vulnerability given that traditional protection and support systems are lacking. There are different aspects of the migration experience that lead to increasing the vulnerability of migrant women, yet they can also lead to enhancing their empowerment. The key elements influencing the empowerment process were identified as: a) exposure to the new work environment; b) successful vs. unsuccessful migration experience; c) employment conditions; d) emotional and physical deprivations; e) marital relationship; and f) role in family decision making and control over resources gathered through migrant women's earnings.

86. Concerning exposure to new work environments, it was noted that the main categories of women migrant helpers in Bangladesh are nurses, domestic workers, and garment and factory workers. The vulnerabilities and opportunities encountered by these different categories of women migrant workers differ. For example, in their new work environment, domestic helpers are extremely vulnerable to verbal and physical abuse resulting from unfamiliarity with the use of electrical appliances (washing machines, vacuum



cleaners, etc.). Language barrier is another factor contributing to misunderstandings and consequent abuse. On the other hand, many domestic helpers expressed their satisfaction and sense of empowerment when these handicaps were overcome. Factory workers, mostly unskilled workers from rural areas, encounter similar situations at the work place. Like the domestic helpers, most of them are able to cope after an initial period of adaptation. In the case of nurses, the work situation is quite favourable and migrants considered that their professional capacity was enhanced through migration.

87. For more than half of the female migrants, migration brought about positive economic results. Being able to contribute substantially to the family's income, these women acquired a great sense of achievement. Only a few of the women interviewed were unsuccessful and had to return home before they could recover the cost of migration. In these cases, women felt a terrible sense of guilt for having put their families into deep economic hardship.

88. Migrant women go through extreme hardship during the period of their stay abroad. Long working hours, contract substitution and non-payment of wages are some of the problems they face. Many migrants observed that the work environment has a detrimental effect on their health (insomnia, stress, failing eyesight, allergies, etc.). Only a few cases of violence, sexual abuse and rape were reported; most female migrants felt safe with their employers.

89. Many women lived an isolated life abroad and had difficulties in communicating with their families. This had an emotional toll on most women who worried about their families back home and suffered from anxiety and insomnia. Some of the female migrants considered such

negative experience as trade-offs for derived from migration and in this way were able to handle the situation.

90. With regard to marital relationships, of the 200 women interviewed, 7 attributed ending their marital relationship due to migration. However, some of these marriages might have had problems prior to migration. In fact, some migrants stated that for them migration was a way to escape from a bad marriage and that migration provided them with an opportunity to avoid conflicts at home as well as social humiliation.

91. The study also noted that migrant women assume a lot of guilt when anything negative happened to the family. To some extent, such guilt feelings were imposed by the family and society.

92. In regards to decision making and control over resources gathered through migration, the field work showed that during migration it was very difficult for the female migrants to influence their family's decisions regarding their remittances. Because migrant women were unable or unwilling to open a bank account in the host country, they had sent all their earning home. Remittances were then treated as part of the family income rather than the savings of the migrant women. In fact, in most cases their earnings were used up by the families. It is interesting to note that if land was purchased through the remittances of female migrants, the deed was registered in the name of other male members of the family rather than the woman's name. In only 16 per cent of the cases was purchased land registered in the female migrants' names. Therefore, the lack of institutional mechanisms such as banking facilities in the host country may hinder women from taking full advantage of their empowered situation.



93. On the other hand, migrant women mentioned that after they migrated and started sending money, their families would value their judgement on different issues of family concern.

94. Finally, despite the hardship and exploitation that migrant women go through, a significant number (84%) of return migrants indicated a desire to go abroad again. This suggests that the migration experience is usually a combination of negative and positive elements, providing women with opportunities for their empowerment while presenting some risks which make them vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

95. Following the presentation of the two studies, the expert from Denmark, Ms N. Sørensen, stated that the findings were remarkable. The question of defining empowerment was, however, still left open. She pointed out that power relations exists not only between persons, but between places (rural/urban, sending/receiving, etc). When dealing with migration issues, what is needed is a concept of power that contains both elements. People from these different places are bestowed with different sense of power. Migrant destinations bestow migrants with powers as well as handicaps. For example, upon return to their home country, Moroccan women who have worked in Saudi-Arabia are given a higher status in religious terms because they are seen to have lived close to the origins of Islam. On the other hand, Moroccan women who have worked in Spain are perceived as "prostitutes" because of the over all perception of Europe as being a "corrupt" place. Furthermore, in host countries, migrants are bestowed different powers depending on their country of origin. In Europe, for example, Muslim women are perceived as oppressed, while Caribbean women are seen to be stronger and more liberalized. These perceptions are important

for the empowerment of migrant women while they are abroad.

96. The expert from Spain, Ms L. Oso, reminded those present that it is of utmost importance to distinguish between acquired *factual* power and power *in representation* when analyzing empowerment. Migrant women may be factual providers of family wealth, but their social status may remain weak because social representation does not conceive of women as the main providers. She pointed out that the way that society conceives and values the social and economic roles of migrant women is important for their empowerment.

97. The expert from France, Ms M. Morokvasic, concurred that normally women should gain more independence through earnings from their own work. If they cannot control the use of their earnings, there is no empowerment. However, the migration process may help to build up women's self-respect even if it was not successful in economic terms.

98. The expert from Lebanon, Ms A. Dibo, agreed that women need not only to take decisions but also need to know which decisions to take and on the basis of what. In this way, not only will women's empowerment be advanced, but development will be advanced as well. The Director designate of INSTRAW, Ms E. Stamiris, concurred stating that power means the possibility to make informed choices. The possibility of making informed choices is particularly important for return migrant women regarding ways to invest their money. If the environment does not allow this possibility, women's empowerment is seriously undermined.

99. The researcher from Bangladesh, Ms T. Siddiqui, emphasized the importance of information for making the right choices. She noted that in Bangladesh there are



NGO initiatives that provide some options for women to invest their savings upon their return. The problem, however, is that not all migrants save enough money and often their savings are spent on emergency situations (e.g., health care).

100. The expert from France, Ms M Moroksavic, emphasized that the importance of self respect for migrant women. It is not only a question of earnings and savings that is important for migrant women's empowerment, but self-respect and dignity.

101. The expert from Philippines, Ms M. Asis, pointed out that women have different statuses at different points of the migration cycle. At the pre-departure stage, women might feel empowered if they have been informed of the cost and benefits of migration and what is likely to happen to them. Upon arrival at the destination, they may know about their rights and the laws of the country, but if there are no appropriate services to which they can have access, all the information they had received prior to migration may not be too useful. She noted that it is important to document and share best practices in receiving countries. In Singapore, for example, a handbook was prepared to orient employers on how to relate to migrant women workers. Such initiatives are very important and contribute to the respect and dignity of migrant women workers.

102. The representative of Migrants Rights Watch, Mr. P. Taran, indicated that one important element of empowerment is the ability of women to defend their dignity and their rights. In this regard, NGOs and governments can play an important role in pre-departure training to inform women of their rights and on supportive organizations that may be available in the receiving country. He also highlighted the importance of self empowerment and building

community organizations, such as the Commission of Filipino Migrant Workers in Europe, where migrant women work together to develop an understanding of their rights and the ways in which they can pursue the assertion of these rights. It is worth noting that national NGOs and governments in host countries often support these organizations.

103. The researcher from Bangladesh, Ms T. Siddiqui, informed that only in recent years have migrant workers associations emerged in Bangladesh. While these associations are very committed, they lack the institutional infrastructure needed to be very effective. There is a Korean Migrant Workers Association which links those who have returned with the private sector in Bangladesh in order to assist them in obtaining local employment. They do not however work on issues of welfare and protection. NGOs and human rights organizations do not have full-fledged programmes or activities to help migrant workers. There are some international organizations, such as IOM, which are just now bringing the issue of migrant women into the agenda. It is important that civil society address the issue of migrant women, provide adequate information so that migrants can make informed choices and hold governments accountable.

104. The Director designate of INSTRAW, Ms E. Stamiris, noted that an important research question relates to why some groups have organized and others have not. The organizational level of migrants differs for temporary and long-term migration. These organizations are extremely important in receiving countries to look after the human rights, dignity and the labour problems of migrants.

105. According to the researcher from Sri Lanka, Ms M. Perera, in Sri Lanka some NGOs have been addressing welfare and



protection of migrant women's rights, but they do not always address the problems that migrant women have identified, particularly problems they face in the receiving country. In Sri Lanka, returnees have not organized in any significant way. Referring to the support that migrants need in the receiving country, the expert from Lebanon, Ms A. Dibo, highlighted the need that migrant women in receiving countries have for legal advice. Some human rights associations are providing some assistance in this regard, but much more is required.

106. The expert from Spain, Ms. L. Oso, agreed that there is a difference between temporary and permanent migrants. Permanent migrants are much more organized, as is the case in Madrid where immigrants from the Philippines represent a very well organized community. She noted that we must distinguish between self-respect and empowerment as the former cannot substitute for the latter. While the issue of self respect is important, it refers to the migrant's human rights, not necessarily migrant women's rights. Empowerment refers specifically to gender roles and must be considered in addressing the situation of women migrant workers.

107. A expert from the Philippines, Ms M. Asis, expressed concern about the lack of support services that migrant women have in receiving countries in regions where there is no tradition for civil society, such as in the Gulf countries. In this regard, the IOM Chief of Research and Forum Activities, Mr. R. Lohmann, indicated that the role of consulates and attachés is very important.

108. A representative from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of the Philippines, Ms R. Limjuco, suggested that the concept of empowerment be used in a two-pronged approach: first, empowerment of female migrant workers in the host country through pre-departure information campaign in order

to better equip them emotionally to handle threats to their dignity and self respect; and second, empowerment of female migrant workers upon return in order to make more productive use of their resources. She also pointed out that when properly motivated NGOs are of great help.

109. A representative of the Permanent Mission of Bangladesh, Mr. Shahidul Haque, proposed that the concept of empowerment be examined taking class into consideration given that migration takes place from different socio-economic strata. Women who migrate as nurses have a greater degree of empowerment than do those that migrate as domestic helpers. Concerning consular functions, he noted that consulates do not have a legal mandate to become involved with migrant issues and therefore cannot intervene in issues related to violence against migrant workers. He noted that one of the reasons why NGOs are not active on migrant matters might be that donors are not interested in the issue either. Some participants, however, noted that this is changing and more donors are interested in migration issues.

110. A representative from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Philippines, Ms R. Limjuco, noted that information campaigns in the host country on migrant rights are extremely important. She also mentioned that despite the limitations of consular functions, there are occasions in which risks must be taken and creative solutions sought.

111. The expert from Lebanon, Ms A. Dibo, called for action to advance the ratification of the 1990 UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. She also mentioned the ongoing work to create a UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its



concomitant protocols against trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants.

112. The representative of the Foreign Ministry of the Philippines, Ms L Salcedo, also noted the importance of promoting bilateral agreements. The Philippines has made bilateral agreements for providing mutual legal assistance on such matters as extraditions, transfer of sentenced persons, etc. In addition, she informed that in the Philippines there is a provision for the creation of a legal assistance fund for migrant workers. Other creative initiatives involve linking with bar associations, human rights associations and NGOs in host countries.

113. One final point referred to the support that women give to other women and the tremendous power that women can derive from helping each other.

#### **G. Violence Against female Migrant Workers**

114. At the opening of discussions on this agenda item, the newly appointed Deputy Director General of IOM, Ms Ndioro Ndiaye, briefly underlined the importance of dealing with the situation of women's temporary labour migration. There is a need for coordination among States of the approaches and policies concerning female migrant women. It is also important to adopt a common methodology for analyzing the situation of female migrant workers, with a view to documenting it in a sound and comparable manner.

115. The researcher from Bangladesh, Ms T. Siddiqui, presented the findings of her study concerning violence against Bangladeshi female migrant workers. Different categories of migrant women are exposed to different problems and their vulnerability varies at different stages of the

migration cycle. Given that most migrant women are young, illiterate and do not understand the language of the country to which they migrate, the resulting communication gaps between domestic helpers and the hosting household members favours misunderstanding about the work to be performed and how it should be achieved. Deviation from expected work is a frequent cause of verbal, and at times physical, abuse against the female worker. While abuse may subside after a few months, in many instances verbal and physical abuse become a lasting behaviour. Domestic helpers are often assigned tasks that they are not trained to do, such as caring for handicapped people, and are often mistreated by employers when they cannot perform their job as expected. Out of the two hundred women interviewed, only 81 said that they had not been exposed to any kind of violence. Sixteen of the women interviewed reported physical abuse.

116. With regard to sexual abuse, only eight of the women interviewed reported having been victims of this kind of abuse. This figure, however, might be underrepresented given that women are not open in discussing this matter. Other forms of violence reported by informants include: breach of contract by the employer, including the payment of a lower salary than was agreed; restrictions of movement; seizure of passport; food restrictions; and neglect of migrant's health by employers.

117. It was difficult for female migrant workers to get assistance from the staff of the consulate or embassy of their country or to bring such violations to the attention of a penal court. Consulate/Embassy staff was often non-supportive. In some cases, labour attachés are suspected of receiving bribes from employers to remain silent. Social attachés often lack training for handling cases of violence against migrant women.



118. The researcher from Sri Lanka, Ms M. Perera, said that problems similar to those cited in the Bangladesh case study were found in the case of Sri Lankan female migrants abroad. Field work conducted in one receiving country revealed that there are many sexually abused runaway domestic helpers who end up in jail or in the Sri Lankan Embassy in that country. At the time of the study, there were some 600 runaway domestic helpers in the embassy. The Sri Lankan Embassy in the host country studied, however, was not equipped to host and deal with so many cases. Many of these runaway domestic helpers had been sexually abused. There were also several cases of runaway domestic helpers who had been seriously injured while running away and been hospitalized. One case of suicide was also reported.

119. Data from the Sri Lankan Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE) indicates that in 1998 2,134 migrant women had presented official complaints of violence upon returning to Sri Lanka; 26 were left stranded in the receiving country and 3 were reported to have been murdered.

120. As a means to curb violence against migrant workers, the Sri Lankan Government requires that everyone register with the embassies in host countries. Illegal migrants, however, do not register and are therefore more vulnerable and unprotected. The Government has also considered keeping a "black list" of employers who have harassed domestic helpers. This, however, has the drawback that it may encourage further use of illegal channels when employers cannot get domestic helpers through formal channels.

121. The Sri Lankan case study showed that the domestic helpers most vulnerable to violence are those who: a) have no education; b) have no exposure to the kind of work they have to perform; c) have had

no pre-departure training; and d) have migrated with falsified documents through unregistered agencies. The researcher from Sri Lanka noted that while some NGOs in the receiving countries that assist women migrant workers do exist, most women migrants do not know about them. Therefore, pre-departure training and adequate information are crucial elements in curbing violence against women migrant workers.

122. The expert from Lebanon, Ms A. Dibo, considered that the reason that migrant women workers decide to re-migrate even if the migration experience was negative is because of poverty. The Sri Lankan researcher, Ms M. Perera, indicated that in the case of Sri Lanka poverty is not the main reason for migration. Those who migrate have their basic needs covered but desire consumer goods (sound systems, TVs, furniture, etc). If they migrate and cannot fulfil their expectations, then they migrate again. Many times expectations grow and as a result, they migrate repeatedly despite the hardships.

123. The expert from Spain, Ms L. Oso, indicated that socio-cultural values and gender roles determine the way women are treated in a particular society and that this, in turn, affects the way migrant women workers are treated. Societies where there is a great deal of violence against women are likely to inflict violence against migrant women as well. She noted that while in Spain there is verbal abuse against women migrant workers, there appears to be very little physical or sexual violence.

124. The expert from France, Ms M. Moroksovic, considered that it could not be generalized that some cultures that are more violent than others. She felt that violence against migrant women is not so much related to cultural factors but rather to the fact that migrant women are women and



aliens and at the bottom line of the society. She noted that one factor that helps curb violence against migrant women workers is the extent to which the sending countries pressure the receiving countries to impose rules on their citizens with regard to the treatment of foreign workers.

125. The Chief of Programme Support Division of IOM, Mr. Marco Gramegna noted that violence is an integral part of irregular migration and trafficking in women. IOM has addressed the issue of trafficking through prevention and assistance. Research is an important aspect of preventive measures and more research is needed on the use of violence against migrant women in different cultures.

126. The expert from Denmark, Ms N. Sørensen, felt that neither embassies nor migrant associations are in the best positions to deal with violence against migrant women. Developing countries, from where most migrant women workers stem from, often have internal strife and conflicts that limit their capacity to attend to their nationals, both females and males, working abroad. We need international mechanisms to deal with this issue given that in the case of embassies many migrants do not register. She also noted that in looking at the issue of violence against migrant women, the families of these women also need to be considered. Families often encourage their very young daughters to migrate with the hope that they will enter into relationships with foreign men and that this will bring economic benefits to the entire family.

127. A representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Philippines, Ms R. Limjuco, stated that embassies have diplomatic immunity and are, therefore, the appropriate entity to offer protection to nationals in foreign countries, particularly when cases of dire physical danger arise.

The expert from France, Ms M. Moroksovic, also observed that some migrant associations do play an important role in the protection of migrant workers. There are some women's migrant associations, for example the Thai women's association in Germany, which denounced cases of violence against migrant women and helped raise public concern around the issue. Associations such as these, therefore, should be encouraged and supported

128. The representative of the Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka, Mr. Sudantha Ganegama-Arachchi, noted that the problem with international instruments is that receiving countries are usually reluctant to endorse them. As a result, both embassies and migrant associations need to assume an active role in protecting migrants in receiving countries. There is no doubt that certain migrants, for example, those that have left conflict situations in their home country, do not approach embassies.

129. The expert from Nigeria, Ms A. Afolayan, observed that the issue of violence against migrant women should be dealt with at its source. In this regard, she commented that parents are often responsible for pushing their daughters into risky migration situations, including trafficking.

130. The expert from the Philippines, Ms M. Asis, informed that the Government of the Philippines has recently instituted a programme in Hong Kong to provide follow-up training to first time migrants. The programme aims to contribute to their knowledge of services and support groups whom they can contact in case of problems. She brought to the attention of the participants another form of violence which consists of kidnapping migrant women for the purpose of extracting and selling organs from their bodies.



131. The representative of the Permanent Mission of the Philippines, Ms E. Callangan, reminded participants of difference between legal and illegal migrants and emphasized the problems in monitoring the situation of the latter as a matter that needs to be given more attention. While some disapprove of the term "illegal" when referring to the status of migrants, she felt the term was useful as it s negative connotation obliges migrants to avoid migrating illegally.

132. One final comment was made by a representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Philippines, Ms L. Salcedo, suggesting that the terms "legal" and "illegal" should be replaced by the terms "documented" and "undocumented" since under equal circumstances no one would like to be considered illegal. Other terms that have been recommended in recent UN resolutions are "regular" and "irregular". She also requested that when addressing the issue of female labour migration, the demand rather than the supply side of the equation be emphasized. If migrant women recognize that they are not only migrating because they have a need, but also because there is a demand for their services, they will feel more empowered.

133. Referring to violence against migrant women workers, she also observed that women are subject to abuse not only in the work place, but also in the recruitment process (e.g., charging of exorbitant fees and contract substitution).

#### **H. Legislation measures and initiatives for the protection of female migrant workers and their families**

134. The researcher from Sri Lanka, Ms M. Perera, reported that in Sri Lanka there are policies and strategies aimed at supporting and protecting migrants. Since 1997, pre-migration training for migrants is compulsory

and attendance is certified by a stamp in the migrant's passport. One problem with the pre-migration training, however, is that it is largely conducted by recruitment agents who are often not interested in providing training on human rights issues. There is also compulsory insurance prior to departure.

135. Sri Lankan migrants are also required to register with their embassies in the receiving countries where welfare and attaché officers have now been posted. One problem with this arrangement is that these officers are not trained in legal matters or in handling traumatized cases. Training of these officers is, therefore, a necessity. Given that there are NGOs sensitive to migrant issues in many host countries, the embassies should have more links with such organizations.

136. Some welfare measures have been in place in Sri Lanka since 1978 and have more recently been reinforced, such as: establishment of day care centres for children of migrant women; special clinics for children of migrant women and for return migrants who might have special health problems; and housing loans.

137. In closing, she informed that Sri Lanka has ratified the 1990 UN Convention on the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. The problem however, is that twenty countries need to ratify the Convention before it comes into effect. A further complication is that host countries are so far not among those who ratified it and cannot be obliged to observe its stipulations.

138. Regarding Bangladesh, the researcher Ms T. Saddiqui, noted that the issue of migration in Bangladesh is so recent that there are few legal mechanisms to protect and ensure the welfare of migrant workers. A 1982 Ordinance addresses



procedural matters (e.g., how licensing for recruiting agencies, fees charged by recruitment agencies, etc.) for controlling and monitoring migration. Nevertheless, this ordinance is under-implemented and recruitment agencies get away with fraudulence. There is also a lack of coordination between the official entities, such as the Ministry of Labour, Foreign Ministry and Home Ministry, which are involved with migrant issues.

139. In 1996, media and human rights organizations in both Bangladesh and some receiving countries began placing attention on the issues of fraudulence and abuse of migrants. At that time, certain civil society sectors began pushing for the development of a legal framework. Last year, professionals at the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit of the University of Dhaka organized a conference with experts from Philippines, Sri Lanka and other countries during which a legal framework based on the Filipino Act of 1990 was drafted. Consultations are now being held with different sectors, including government. Technical assistance is being sought from international organizations, such as the International Labour Organisation (ILO), but such assistance will only be provided at the initiative of the Government. The researcher from Bangladesh, however, felt that it is unlikely that at this point the Government will take an initiative on the matter, although some Parliamentarians are becoming interested and seem willing to push the issue of migration beyond the procedural matters stipulated in the 1992 Ordinance.

140. Very little work has been done on migration by the NGO sector in Bangladesh, but they are also interested and willing to get more involved.

141. Programmes such as pre-departure training and orientation are non-existent.

The Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit is trying to involve NGOs and return migrants in these kinds of initiatives which can contribute to minimize the vulnerability of migrant women workers.

142. The representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Philippines, Ms L. Salcedo, shared the experience of her country in setting up a legislative framework to assist migrant workers. It took the deaths of two Philippine domestic helpers in Singapore and the straining of relationships between Singapore and Philippines in order to pass the Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act. This law provides assistance to Filipinos overseas, even to the undocumented migrants in distress. The Migrant Workers Act contains some penal provisions for illegal recruitment and there are pending bills that would address trafficking in women specifically.

143. The expert from Spain, Ms L. Oso, noted that during the early stages of Spain as a receiving country there were no policies regarding migration. In 1985, a severe law restricting migration was passed. Given that this generated a great deal of irregular migration, in 1993 a quota policy was established. The quota policy however, did not solve the problem of irregular flows as it was used mainly to regularize irregular migrants while other migrants continued to enter the country on an irregular basis. Based on this experience, she stressed the importance that receiving countries establish migration policies that do not result in generating irregular migration.

#### I. Working groups

144. At this stage, the expert meeting split in two working groups with a view to drafting conclusions and recommendations. It was agreed that the recommendations would be divided between the country of origin and



the receiving country while specific recommendations for governments of both groups of countries would also be elaborated. It was agreed that separate recommendations would be made for intergovernmental organizations, NGOs and research institutes.

145. The two working groups proposed different sets of recommendations. They were presented in the final session in the afternoon and subsequently merged in one text. Participants agreed to them in consensus.

## J. Conclusions and Recommendations

### Conclusions

Recognition was given to the need for the promotion and protection of the human rights and dignity of female migrant workers who contribute significantly to the development of economic and social conditions in countries of origin and receiving countries. The receiving countries should value the important contribution of female migrants to the welfare of the family, the community, the economy and in general, to the country as a whole.

The importance of the *International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families*, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1990, was stressed as a basic body of legal principles to be observed. To ensure their full implementation, States were encouraged to sign or ratify and accede the 1990 Convention, as well as *ILO Conventions Nos. 97 and 143* and the *UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*.

There was agreement that States should facilitate the productive employment of documented migrant women (including women who have been determined to be refugees according to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees) through greater recognition of foreign education and credentials, and by adopting an integrated approach to labour market training that incorporates language training, as adopted at the IV World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995.

There was also consensus on the implementation of the agreements of the World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen, 1995) calling on Governments of receiving countries to ensure the protection of migrants and their families, giving priority to programmes and strategies that combat religious intolerance, racism, ethnocentrism, xenophobia and gender discrimination, and generate the necessary public sensitivity in that regard.

Dialogue and cooperation between countries of origin and destination was seen as a key development issue required for the creation of decent living and working conditions for migrant women, providing them protection and support, and assisting them to make optimal use of their earnings.

The importance of contributions from all stakeholders, including civil society organizations, migrants' organizations, Governments, employers, private recruitment agencies, research institutions and international organizations to provide support to female migrant workers to better defend their rights was emphasized.



## Recommendations

### For Governments of both countries of origin and receiving countries

- Sign or ratify and accede to and implement relevant international instruments on migrant workers;
- Develop bilateral and multilateral agreements, memoranda of understanding and engage in consultations with a view to raising awareness and ensuring the protection of the human rights and dignity of migrant women in receiving countries;
- Adopt legislation sanctioning and punishing trafficking and illegal recruitment of women;
- Review the *Vienna Convention on Consular Relations* of 1963 with a view to facilitating consulates to more effectively act in cases of criminal actions against nationals of other signatory states; the prerogatives of consular, labour and welfare officers relating to migrant workers in receiving countries should be broadened and their competencies adequately enhanced. Such officers should be females when female migration predominates;
- Encourage the participation of civil society in developing and implementing appropriate measures in the campaign against violence against women migrant workers by supporting innovative partnerships among public agencies, private business sector and non-governmental organizations;
- Provide, in coordination with international agencies and intergovernmental organizations, as well as concerned NGOs, training for frontline officers such as immigration,

police and consular officials, among others, on the proper handling of victims of traumatic stress as a result of gender-based violence. The pertinent provisions of the 1999 Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) Resolution "Women and mental health, with emphasis on special groups", should be implemented;

- Collect sex-disaggregated data/statistics on migration.

### For Governments of countries of origin

- Develop comprehensive migration policies to facilitate safe and protected migratory movements taking gender into account. In this regard, policies banning the migration of women should be revised so that irregular migration can be reduced to the extent possible. The human rights of women, in particular social and economic rights, should be ensured so that women can choose whether to migrate or not and have control over their savings and investment gains;
- With a view to adequately informing female migrant workers on the social, economic and legal conditions in receiving countries, pre-departure courses should be organized by Governments and NGOs and made compulsory for migrants and for licensed recruitment agencies.

Those pre-departure seminars should include:

- i. information on available consultative and supportive services and health care in the host country, including consular services, human rights groups, migrants associations, etc.
- ii. basic information including cultural orientation and language training



- iii. basic awareness about health risks and care
  - iv. basic information on management of income
  - v. information on the risks of trafficking, rape, ill-treatment, abuse and exploitation
  - vi. information on the rights of migrant workers and labour laws in the receiving countries
  - vii. basic information on stress management.
- Monitor practices of recruitment agents to prevent malpractices and the exploitation of women migrants, including matters related to fees charged to migrants by these agents;
  - Monitor conditions of employment in major receiving countries. Civil society organizations should be involved in such monitoring;
  - Develop institutional mechanisms in consular offices in the receiving countries for monitoring the working and living conditions of migrant workers and provide assistance in problems that they may encounter (e.g. welfare officers, labour attachés) and develop new services such as emergency hotlines and support networks;
  - With a view to ensuring the smooth reintegration of migrant women into the country of origin and the application of skills acquired during the migration, training programmes, employment and livelihood-related programmes should be developed. If needed, therapy for those who have undergone traumatic stress should be provided;
  - Encourage NGOs and frontline government officials to acquire basic information/training on mental health to enable them to provide proper care and

support to migrant women suffering from mental health problems;

- Governments should collaborate with non-governmental organizations, migrant organizations and self-help groups to provide supportive measures for the families left behind. These supportive measures should ensure the welfare of the left-behind families of female migrants, taking into consideration the needs of different members of the families, including the children, the elderly persons and husbands, with particular attention to the need to address the educational losses that may affect the children;
- Develop incentive structures for effective and efficient use of income by migrant women;
- Establish crisis centres in diplomatic/consular posts located in countries where there is a proliferation of women migrant workers, to provide assistance and safe haven to women migrant workers in distress.

#### For Governments of receiving countries

- Receiving countries should ensure and facilitate communication of female migrants with their family members abroad, their consulates and facilitate legal protection, including communication with lawyers;
- Protect the rights of migrant women by ensuring safe treatment by police and other official authorities and prosecute cases of abuse by private employers and recruitment agents;



**For International and Intergovernmental Organizations**

- Develop pilot projects covering all aspects of pre-departure programmes for female migrants and use modern information technology for dissemination of information on those programmes at wider level.
- Assist and support governments through technical assistance in their role, as indicated above. In particular, assist national authorities in countries of origin in their efforts to better inform female migrant workers and employers;
- International organizations should support information activities and media programmes which inform on the legal, social and economic conditions in the receiving countries and the risks of trafficking and ill-treatment of migrants;
- International training seminars and workshops specially geared towards information on international labour standards should be held for officials in both origin and receiving countries with a view to securing the rights of female migrant workers and enhancing respect for their cultural and religious values;
- Assist in the organization of workshops for the conduct of media campaigns in host countries, sensitizing on the positive role of female labour migrants in the receiving society and denouncing the abuses against them;
- Promote the signing or ratification of and compliance with the relevant international conventions and/or work to ensure the protection of the human rights of female migrant workers;
- Encourage and support NGO involvement in these areas;

- Facilitate dialogue and cooperation between countries of origin and receiving countries, including the elaboration of bilateral and multilateral agreements;
- Assist national governments to develop appropriate gender-sensitive migration policies;
- IOM, INSTRAW and ILO should encourage the adoption of comparable data-collection systems including sex-disaggregated data, *inter alia*, through the development of means such as the ILO's International Labour Migration Database;
- Draft a developmental policy framework for the return/repatriation/reintegration of women migrant workers.

**For NGOs and other members of civil society organizations such as migrant organizations and self-help organizations**

- Develop networking between receiving countries, countries of origin and civil society organizations;
- Support and assist in the development of migrant community self-help organizations for female workers and members of their family;
- Lobby for the signature, ratification and accession to and compliance with relevant international instruments for the protection of migrant's rights;
- Women's NGOs should address the issue of protecting women migrants and likewise, migrant associations or NGOs should give attention to women



migrants' specific problems and include them in their agendas;

- Make proactive use of media to raise public awareness about issues of concern to migrant women and highlight the economic contribution of female migrant workers in both receiving countries and countries of origin;
- Collaborate with governments in pre-employment and all follow-up training for migrant women and in creating and providing supportive measures for the families left behind;
- Assist governments in developing measures for the proper care and assistance to be given to women migrants in distress or under stress.

**For research institutes/researchers (national/international)**

- With a view toward obtaining a full understanding of the economic and social contribution of female migrant workers in receiving countries, impact studies should be initiated carried out simultaneously in both the receiving countries and countries of origin, as per the outline that follows;
- Conduct research and gender analysis on:
  - i. Cost/benefit and social impact of temporary migration on:
    - migrant women, migrant men
    - family and household remaining behind
    - individual household members
    - community
    - sending countries
    - receiving countries

1. Clarify the concept of women's empowerment in terms of:
  - class, ethnic and other social identities
  - access to knowledge and information
  - increase/decrease range of choices
  - increase-decrease self-confidence and ability to defend and maintain dignity
  - participation in decision making in family/community
  - power in fact vs. social representation of power
  - self-enforcement and ability to protect own rights
  - economic independence
  - encourage the use of existing indicators of gender violence and develop indicators of empowerment of female migrants
- ii. Conduct longitudinal studies before and after women's migration
- iii. Disaggregate data and statistics in terms of sex
- iv. Mainstream gender into migration studies and research
- v. Research and analyze differences between permanent and temporary migration of women
- vi. Conduct comparative analyses on the conditions and impact of different migrant destinations on migrant women's empowerment
- vii. Engage in macro as well as micro/qualitative studies, including on studies income management and use of remittances, to facilitate broader understanding of the social and economic dimension of women's migration



- viii. Conduct research on cultural perspectives related to female migration, including changes in racial attitudes
- ix. Conduct research on gender aspects of circular migration
- x. Conduct evaluation research on impact of governmental and non-governmental interventions with regard to migrant female workers.

#### Follow up

- INSTRAW and IOM should arrange national seminars with relevant stakeholders in order to inform and sensitize on female migrant issues. These seminars among other things, should disseminate the findings of the field surveys conducted in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka and the results of the INSTRAW/IOM Expert Group Meeting on Temporary Female Migrant Workers in which the findings of the surveys were discussed (Geneva, 30-31 August 1999);
- INSTRAW and IOM should pursue their mutual efforts to greater awareness raising of the specific situation and needs of female migrant workers and, to this effect, carry out studies on female migrant workers in other world regions such as Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean. Research should be conducted in different parts of the world with a view to providing a global perspective on the issue. They should develop support activities for both receiving and origin countries in order to deepen the understanding of the specific situation of female migrant workers;
- INSTRAW and IOM should design training programmes for labour attachés of origin countries;
- INSTRAW and IOM should, in coordination with placement agents, prepare and make available orientation handbooks for employers, including information on the rights of migrants, the rights of employers, basic cultural information on the countries of origin and gender-specific cultural traditions;
- INSTRAW and IOM should explore the use of modern information technology to promote awareness of female labour migration;
- Pursuant to the 1999 UN Commission on the Status of Women Resolution on "Women and mental health, with emphasis on special groups", INSTRAW and IOM should coordinate with the World Health Organization (WHO) and NGOs concerned, on the issuance of a manual to guide frontline agencies on the proper treatment of women migrant workers who have undergone traumatic stress, as a result of gender-based violence, with a view to preventing an exacerbation of their condition;
- IOM should promote the inclusion of female labour migration on the agenda of regional intergovernmental consultations on migration.



INSTRAW / IOM EXPERT GROUP MEETING  
ON  
TEMPORARY LABOUR MIGRATION OF WOMEN

IOM Headquarters – First Floor Conference Room  
17 route des Morillons, Geneva / Switzerland  
30-31 August 1999

AGENDA

**Monday, 30 August 1999**

**Morning session**

Registration of participants  
Opening/Presentation of the project by IOM and INSTRAW  
**Context, scale and scope of female migration in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka**

Presentations by research teams

**Economic benefits/shortcomings of female labour migration**

Presentations by research teams

Discussion by experts and participants

**Afternoon session**

**Social benefits and shortcomings of female labour migration**

Discussion by experts and participants

**Empowerment of female migrants**

Discussion by experts and participants

**Tuesday, 31 August 1999**

**Morning session**

**Violence against female migrant workers**

Presentations by research teams

Discussion by experts and participants

**Legislation, measures and initiatives for protection of female migrant workers and their families**

Presentations by research teams

Discussion by experts and participants

**Afternoon session**

Working groups to discuss and identify:

- a) Research/data and training gaps
- b) Policy recommendations to improve the legal and social situation of migrant women and members of the family
- c) Follow-up activities

Presentations by Working Groups

Conclusions and recommendations

Closing of the Meeting



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## Annex III: Executive Summaries

## Executive Summary of Sri Lankan Case Study

Temporary migration for labour of Sri Lankan workers, initially to the oil-exporting West Asian countries, commenced in the mid 1970s. By the early 1980s, migration had escalated in numbers, had spread to the East Asian countries and included women migrants who outnumbered men. The women migrated primarily for unskilled work as domestic aides. The numbers that migrated annually ranged from an estimated 15,000 in 1977 to nearly 160,000 in 1998 and, the female component ranged from 55 per cent in 1988 to 75 per cent in 1997. The predominance of female migrants for domestic service is evident from the data for 1996 which shows that of a proportion of 73 per cent of female migrants within the total of both male and female migrants for that year, 68 per cent had migrated for jobs as housemaids. This category of female migrant is the focus of this study for a variety of reasons. One is the magnitude itself. The other is the concern regarding the level of violence and exploitation that this category of females is subjected to, by virtue of the nature of their job in the informal unregulated sector of work and their greater vulnerability, as compared with males, within such a work environment.

The first part of the study discusses the official data on migration, national policy and the regulatory framework with respect to female migration, the role of government, non-government organizations and the international laws as well as their implications for female migrants. The second part presents an analysis of the findings from a survey of 200 migrant and non-migrant households. Four categories of migrant households were selected: households of current female migrants; households of current male migrants; households of female migrant returnees; and households of male migrant returnees. The analysis draws some comparisons with a control group of non-migrant households. A simultaneous study in one host country in West Asia provided information from interviews with a wide range of persons including members of parliament, government officials, academics, lawyers, women's organizations and recruiting agents. Information from the embassy staff and from female and male migrant workers in that country was incorporated in the analysis.

Government policy on migration has in general been liberal. But since 1977, the open economic policy of the government and the impact of globalization were key determinants of greater opportunities for labour migration. Government policy has been supportive of labour migration considering the opportunities it offers in terms of easing the high rate of unemployment (which was about 11 per cent in 1998) and enhancing foreign exchange earnings through migrant remittances. This is currently one of the leading sources of foreign exchange and in 1997 amounted to nearly 786 million US\$. This is a phenomenal increase from only 35 million US\$ in 1980.

The Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE) was set up by an Act of Parliament in 1985, as the statutory authority within the Ministry of Labour, responsible for administering government policy on labour migration and regulating and managing the process of migration mainly through private registered agents. The SLBFE has been refining its database on overseas workers and the services accorded to migrants have been progressively improved to encompass specifically, female migrants and their families. An amendment to the Act in 1994 stipulated compulsory registration with the SLBFE and pre-migration training for



unskilled female migrants. This was accompanied by a package of services that included insurance coverage for accidents and illness, scholarships for children of migrant females who qualified in stipulated examinations, pilot projects for health clinics for female returnees and day-care centres for children of migrant females.

In an effort to curb the harassment of female migrants, particularly housemaids, by their employers, steps have been taken to blacklist employers found to have used violence against employees. Sri Lanka was one of eight countries to ratify the UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Their Families (1990). The government has taken other measures such as conducting ministerial level discussions with host countries and strengthening the embassies to equip them to deal with problems of migrant labour. It is inevitable that there will be major limitations in effective implementation and outreach of national policies and programmes, primarily because host countries cannot be compelled to adopt protective measures with respect to migrant labour.

Various civil society organizations such as non-governmental organizations and trade unions carry out programmes covering welfare and training. Others provide services to migrant women who are victims of harassment and violence. The outreach of such efforts, however, is not known.

The exploratory research conducted in this study supplements a pool of research that contains more studies on female than on male migration, which has been carried out over a decade or more. But this study extends the canvas in exploring some new aspects in the migrant experience of women, by focusing on the role and status of females and males left behind in households of female migrants and of male migrants. Findings on aspects such as the reasons for migration, the use of remittances and the problems faced by female migrants have been relatively well documented.

The sample of female and male migrants and returnees was selected on pre-determined criteria. Given that the study focused on the impact of migration on changes in gender roles within the families left behind, the sample included migrants who were married with children and who had at least two years of migration or after return as the case may be. Information on personal experience was obtained from returnees who could provide the "before/after" scenarios. First hand information on the management of the household in the absence of the migrant could be obtained from households of current migrants both male and female.

The profile of migrants showed that they are young, between 20 and 30 years of age; while 6 per cent had no education, the balance had from 6 to 14 years of formal schooling; 4 per cent had been successful in the General Certificate of Education-Advanced Level. Since weightage was given to married migrants in the selection for the study, 86 per cent of the 140 current female migrants and female returnee migrants were married, 6 per cent were unmarried but providers for their families, 3 per cent were widowed and 5 per cent were separated. About 40 per cent of the female migrants had been engaged in self-employment or in casual labour prior to migration. Their husbands were unemployed (27%) in informal sector activities or agriculture (67%); only 6% were in formal sector employment but in lower grades. While all these households had experienced economic deprivation as stated by the migrants, it was found that they had been able to supply their basic needs. The reason for migration was therefore, the need to improve their income and their quality of life. Their objectives were very



similar -- to earn a lump sum of money to invest in a home, children's education, and the acquisition of household goods and amenities.

The determinants of female migration therefore were not purely economic. Combined with economic needs were social factors, as stated by 6 per cent of female migrants who wished to escape from problems with husband or family and 1 per cent who liked travel and adventure. The persistence of social factors and the need to keep up with economic gains prompted repeated migrations. About 33 per cent of females migrated up to five times in pursuit of their objectives. There were others (26%) who were unable to complete their contracts and suffered losses as well as the ill effects of their migration experience. About 18 per cent of such casualties arose from illegal or undocumented migration.

About 80 per cent of female migrants had encountered various problems in the host country. Long unregulated work hours and non-payment of wages were the most frequently cited problems. But physical assault, sexual harassment and being jailed for fabricated offenses were highlighted in the study.

Migration had mixed effects on households. While about 45 per cent were assessed as successful in their migration about 35 per cent were only partially successful and 20 per cent had failed to make gains or suffered losses. Outcome was measured in terms of both economic and social benefits and the capacity of the household to provide at least its consumption needs after return from migration. Low savings and investment by migrant families had resulted in their inability to sustain their gains. This was evident in the partially successful households and in those that failed.

Migration has had a considerable impact on gender roles within the family. Changes were manifested in several different aspects such as assuming the role of provider and increased decision making. Those who successfully provided the household with capital assets had enhanced their role as provider. In 43 per cent of the households, the female migrant was in fact the sole provider. This category included unmarried females, some of them without a father, and others who had fathers who were not earning, females who were widowed or separated and were heads of households, and about a quarter of the married females whose husbands were unemployed (5 %) or earning only intermittently from casual work. Meanwhile the wives of male migrants had enhanced their capacity for decision making. They made decisions on matters such as housing and investments, areas in which male decision making was traditionally dominant.

The support of household members in household care during female migration had extracted a price in heavy work loads, loss of educational opportunities and postponement of marriage for young females such as daughters and sisters, while the elderly females gave a mixed response. In some cases marriage was postponed until they were over 30 years of age and considered too old for marriage, in terms of prevailing social norms. They found it a burden but also enjoyed the interaction with grand children. Some of the daughters had liked the new responsibilities in managing the home. The availability of such support, however, meant that male members did not need to change their typical male tasks in the household. But indications of positive role change were evident in the greater sharing of tasks by husband and wife leading to a complementarity of roles rather than a shift of responsibilities and empowerment. This had come about with a building up of the woman's capacity as a consequence of exposure to the



public sphere through migration and the considerable financial contribution of the female to the household. Family bonds had been strengthened between husband and wife and with the extended family. Nevertheless, occurrences of marital break up were seen in 9 per cent of female migrant families. A significant feature of family disruption was the capacity migration had afforded to some of the females to move out with the children from a problem-loaded marriage at times with alcoholic or drug addict partners to a more constructive environment for the family.

One of the more tangible outcomes of female migration has been the improvements made in housing, living conditions and in ownership of assets. Ownership of houses had increased by 58 per cent among the returnee females, ownership of land by 40 per cent. Some 20 per cent had provided a safe water supply and latrine facilities and another 17 per cent obtained electricity. The ripple effects of these and other household goods had long term implications for the household economy as well as its quality of life.

Two important areas of concern with respect to the outcome of female migration have been: a) the safety and protection of the person and of the rights to a safe work environment, and to just remuneration for work; and b) the welfare of the family left behind and ensuring the sustainability, even at a modest scale, of the gains that have accrued to a majority of female migrant households.

The efforts of national governments in labour sending countries to ensure the rights and welfare of their workers would have limited effect in the light of their inability to influence the host countries. It is therefore imperative that the concerned international agencies take a lead role in securing rights of migrant labour through pressures on host countries within a human rights perspective.



## Executive Summary of Bangladeshi Case Study

Short-term migration of women has become an integral part of today's global economy. Under this changed environment a major scope of employment for Bangladeshi women has been created in some of the Asian countries. A section of female labour force of Bangladesh has responded positively to such an opportunity and took up employment overseas. Until now very little information has been available on the flow of female migrants from Bangladesh, their migration pattern, the factors that contribute to such migration and the impact it creates on the female migrant workers themselves and their family members. In recent times concerns have been expressed about the level of exploitation and violence to which these women are subjected. This study attempts to advance the understanding about temporary migration of women from Bangladesh.

This report is organized into two parts. The first part compiles existing data on female migration, the role of government and private institutions in managing migration and existing national and international laws and their implication for female migrants. The second part highlights the impact of migration on woman migrant workers, their children, husband and other extended family members.

The Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) is in charge of keeping the record of Bangladeshis who have taken up overseas employment. However, the record keeping system of BMET does not have provision for gender-segregated data. Official records inform that from 1991 to June 1998, 13,049 women have migrated on short-term employment. This is less than 1 per cent of the total official flow. This figure is surprisingly low, given the global context of the massive increase in the number of female migrants compared to male. The official figures do not seem to represent the actual flow of female migration from Bangladesh. It is estimated that the number of female migrants should be five to ten times more than the official figure. The imposition of restrictions/ban on migration of women by successive regimes have created a situation where more female migrants unofficially join the short-term international labour market than Bangladeshi males.

Various organizations, both governmental and private, are involved in managing migration from Bangladesh. Unfortunately, none of the organizations have assistance programmes for female migrants. As government does not encourage the migration of female migrants so far BMET has provided very little attention to them. Moreover, one cannot expect much from BMET, given the meagre allocation of resources that it has at its disposal. Recruiting agencies have shown some success in bringing in contracts for skilled female migrants. However, so far, they made very little investment in training the female migrants. Civil society organizations, have yet to get involved with the migrant workers in any major way. Some NGOs and human rights organizations have provided legal support to a few individual women migrants, but not one single NGO is involved in any programme directed towards female migrants. Migrants in general are absent in the agenda of the trade unions of Bangladesh. The organizations have very little information on female migrant workers. Recently returnee migrant workers have developed their own organizations. Already they have voiced protest on issues such as the ban on female migration, misuse of the Migrant Welfare Fund, etc. Presently, they are engaged in developing a database of returnee migrant workers, both male and female. Over the last two years, the broad based migrant workers association is operating only on the subscription of its members. Given the fund constraints the performance of these organizations



is noteworthy. In the past research on migration was very much focused into remittance aspect. Recently, a university-based research organization has embarked on promotion of protection issues for changes in policy and legal framework.

The 1982 Ordinance was promulgated to promote export of workers from Bangladesh. But the government has yet to frame necessary rules for implementation of the Ordinance. In any case, the Ordinance does not address protection and welfare issues of migrant workers. Successive governments followed a very restrictive policy with respect to women migrants. Such policy has violated women's constitutional rights of access to equal opportunity. Bangladesh has recently become party to the Vienna Convention on Protection of Rights of Migrant Workers and their Families. It has yet to ratify the instrument.

Exploratory fieldwork conducted under the study for the first time gives a comprehensive picture of migration of a large number of women. Findings of the study show that relatively younger women are migrating. The family size of the female migrants is close to national average and most of the female migrants interviewed went abroad in the early 1990s. Kuwait was a major destination of the female migrants. Domestic work, garment and factory job and nursing are the major categories of work they were engaged in. The highest number of women worked as domestic aides. Almost half the women who went abroad were illiterate.

On an average, these 200 women stayed for more than three years. For various reasons some came back before finishing the first contract. They are the ones who sustained major losses. Except for the nurses, most of the women migrants experienced long working hours. The most vulnerable regarding work hours were the domestic aides. The female migrants used many methods for communicating with their families. The illiterate female migrants developed an effective method of communication through taped messages. Both female migrants and their families experienced stressful times as communication between the two parties was not always regular. Unlike the male migrants, the female migrants mostly sent money through official channels.

Women migrants faced various types of problems when they were abroad. These are related to health, physical and sexual abuse, non-payment and under-payment of salary etc. However, during migration female migrants were earning a significant portion of their family income. The total remittance sent by female migrants was also not negligible. More than half the female migrant households experienced an improved economic standard. But such a standard could not be sustained by the household when the female migrant returned from abroad. Families of female migrants mostly used the remittance on consumption, health care and education. Investment in productive ventures was very low.

Migration of the principal woman of the household has had mixed results on the children they left behind. In some cases, education of the child was facilitated by mothers' migration, in other cases, it had a detrimental effect, particularly on the girl-child's education. Experience of 200 migrant families show that the absence of the principal woman of the household did not alter the gender division of labour within the household. Male members shouldered very little additional responsibility. This was possible as the female migrant's role was substituted by the elderly members of the family. The elderly women felt that looking after the household and the children in the absence of woman migrant was very demanding. However, few resented such



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