

## **“Migration: Reducing or Inducing Risk?”**

SDPI Seminar Monday, September 10, 2007  
- *Summary & recommendations* -

### *Speakers*

- Dr. Zafar Mueen Nasir, Director (Policies)  
Policy Planning Cell, Ministry of Labor Manpower & Overseas Pakistanis
- Mr. Arbab Muhammad Azhar, Director General  
Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment
- Dr. Seema Pervez, (Retired) Professor  
National Institute of Psychology, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad
- Mr. Maqsood Ahmad Jan, SDPI

### *Background*

The process of migration affects a large number of individuals, households, and communities worldwide – including Pakistan. An estimated four million Pakistanis move abroad in search of livelihoods. Before the onset of the oil boom in the Middle East, Pakistan's migrant workers left for the UK and other Western countries. Since the 1970s, Gulf countries have opened job opportunities and absorbed millions of Pakistani workers. These migrant streams are associated with significant financial flows. During last fiscal year alone, migrants' remittances exceeded Rs. 240 billion.

Focussing on migrants' contributions to household incomes and the national exchequer, migration is seen as a strategy to improve people and nations' socio-economic conditions. However, the search for greener pastures abroad has a price as well. Migration brings about significant changes in the lives of those left behind. Especially changes in the gender division of tasks between women and men that may increase women's workloads. Dangerous communicable diseases, such as HIV/AIDS, have been another risk associated with migration.

In a research project on "The Role of Transnational Migration for Women and Men in North-West Pakistan," the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) takes a closer look at the opportunities and risks associated with migration from rural NWFP to the Gulf States. In order to contribute to better policy-making and greater benefits from migration for the country as well as for the migrants themselves, SDPI involves relevant stakeholders and makes its research findings accessible to them. For this purpose, a public seminar on “Migration: Reducing or Inducing Risk?” was conducted on September 10, 2007.

### *Summary*

Dr. Zafar Mueen Nasir, director (Policies) Planning Cell, Ministry of Labour, Manpower, & Overseas Pakistanis, Mr. Arbab Azhar, Director General, Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment, Prof. Dr. Seema Pervez, former professor Quaid-i-Azam University and SDPI researcher Mr. Maqsood Ahmad Jan contributed as panelists to the seminar.

Dr Zafar identified the absence of employment opportunities and growing income disparities in Pakistan as the main catalysts of migration. He deplored that, despite the fact that these workers are contributing significantly to the national economy, migrants' legal rights are often not recognised at the national and international levels, leaving them very vulnerable. Integration into the host society is a constant challenge for them. Special categories of migrants, such as victims of human trafficking as well as refugees, are particular at risk. At the national level, he stressed, the loss of a skilled workforce, the so-called 'brain drain', is another risk associated with transnational migration. He said that the implementation of existing legal instruments, more emphasis on equal rights and treatment at work, a social charter for migrant workers, as well as the ratification of international conventions providing for equal treatment, jobs, wages, security, and union rights are some of the necessary measures that specifically need attention in our policies.

Mr. Arbab Azhar detailed the existing regulation of emigration under the Emigration Ordinance 1979 & Rules. Under this ordinance, risk coverage of migrant workers proceeding abroad for better earnings includes pre-departure briefings about the new environment as well as support at the destination in the form of community protection officers in the migrants' host countries.

Prof. Dr. Seema Pervez elaborated on the issue of migrants' integration in the host society. She highlighted 'the other side of the coins' that are remitted. According to her, the same migrant workers who are seen as key instruments for raising foreign exchange face serious psychological, social, and religious problems in the host countries. Their value systems are seriously shaken by the confrontation with a different culture. She blamed the lack of attention to the value of tolerance in the Pakistani society for this. Compounding the problem of integration, both migrants and their accompanying families often experience discrimination in the host countries. Overall, she criticised the lack of the government's attention to these psycho-social risks associated with migration.

From the perspective of sending regions, Mr. Maqsood Ahmad Jan shared the tentative results of SDPI's ongoing research study on the effects of transnational migration in rural NWFP. In the areas under study in the Upper Dir and Swat districts, remittances are the most important source of cash income, covering expenditures for food, health, clothing, and education. However, the fact that no significant differences in food intake, health status, or education were observed between households with and without migrants raises questions regarding the role of remittances for socio-economic progress. In some households, migration of their husbands, brothers, or fathers exacerbates women's vulnerability. Their workload increases as they take over male tasks and their dependency on other household members' intensifies. On the brighter side, migrants' housing structures, including water supply and sanitation, are often found to be improved after migration. This might have a positive effect on the household members' health. At the village level, remittances sometimes stimulate construction, small-scale trade, and transport activities, with positive effects on employment opportunities and wage levels.

### *Recommendations*

- At the national level, the Government of Pakistan (GoP) should form a Labour Ministerial Committee on Migration for better coordination among state-level stakeholders. This includes the improvement of skills certification, in which better cooperation between the national and the provincial tiers is required.
- The GoP should ratify the ILO conventions 97 (on Migration for Employment) and 143 (on Migrations in Abusive Conditions and the Promotion of Equality of Opportunity and Treatment of Migrant Workers) as well as the United Nations International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers.
- The Government should campaign for these conventions' ratification in the main host countries of Pakistani migrants.
- At the regional and international levels, the GoP should seek greater cooperation regarding the protection of the rights and interests of migrant workers in forums such as the SAARC, the ASEAN, and the WTO.
- Also, the GoP should seek greater and more effective cooperation between sending and receiving countries in order to protect the rights of the migrant workers through enhanced information and regulation at the grass-roots level.
- The GoP should address the neglected issues of migrants' identity, assimilation, and discrimination in the host society, for example, through awareness raising and counselling.
- Migration-related welfare activities of the Government, such as housing and education, should be extended to the main sending regions, which are currently neglected.
- Development interventions should take the role of migration and remittances into account, for example, regarding development of small and medium enterprises and financial infrastructure.
- Ultimately, infrastructure improvement of and economic development in sending regions should become the Government's main concern rather than the stimulation of migration. This includes education and health-related awareness-raising activities in order to improve livelihoods in the sending regions.