

CRVS and Safer Migration in Bangladesh

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The Government of Bangladesh has given utmost importance to the establishment of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS). United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) defines civil registration as the continuous, permanent, compulsory and universal recording of the occurrence and characteristics of vital events pertaining to the population in accordance with the legal requirement of each country. CRVS is important as its coverage is universal and it is a continuous process. It maintains confidentiality of personal information and the information are disseminated on a regular basis¹. Along with six components of CRVS i.e. birth, death, marriage, divorce, adoption and cause of death, the government has also added two other components. These are enrolment in education system and internal and international migration. Objective of this paper is to explore how the CRVS can help ensure safer migration. It also aims to understand the potential role that CRVS can play in monitoring progress in migration governance.

Importance of Migration

Migration is an integral part of current development process of Bangladesh. Rural urban migration is one of the major forces that contribute to economic growth of the country. In the formal sectors, readymade garments and other manufacturing companies have created employment for a large number of workers. 80% of those who work in the garments sector are female. Along with economic reasons, internal migration may increase further due to affects of climate change. Short term contract labour migration is another important economic sector of Bangladesh. Last year alone 1 million people have moved to Gulf, other Arab and Southeast Asian countries. In 2017 Bangladesh received US\$13 billion as workers' remittance. Although flow of remittance is witnessing negative growth for a couple of years, it is still quite large. It is almost 7 times higher than foreign aid and 9 times higher than that of foreign investment and equivalent of 7% of GDP.

Even after such huge contribution of internal and international migrants to the economy of the Bangladesh, the migrants face all kinds of hardship and inhumane and degrading treatment. The successive government of Bangladesh has taken various measures to reduce fraudulence from migration process and to streamline recruitment. It has established a new ministry as early as in 2001. It has framed the Overseas Employment Policy also as early as in 2006. In 2013 it enacted the Migration and Overseas Employment Act. For those who are working in the garments and other manufacturing factories in Bangladesh, government has set the wage. To ensure safety and security of the workers many measures have been undertaken recently. All these show the commitment of the government to ensure the rights of the internal and international migrants. Incorporation of migration as one of the vital statistics also demonstrates the commitment of the government to better serve the migrants.

At this stage it is important to understand how the government plans to generate the data. Data on those who migrate internationally for short term contract work is maintained by the BMET. Does the government have any plan to establish link to BMET data with Household Index Survey (HIS) and the

¹ Source: United Nations Principles and Recommendations for vital statistics, revision 3 (2014)

National Population Register (NPR). The Household Census Data of BBS also has information on migration experience of the households. Recently BBS has also generated data on international migration. The government document shows that the plan is to link information from the Department of Immigration and Passport. It is a good source however it will only have limited data on embarkation and disembarkation through airport. If BMET data on international migrants and BBS data could be used then it will have more information at the same time BBS data will cover both internal and international migration.

Incorporation of migration in CRVS has the potential to help both government and the migrants. At the same time if data protection is weak than it also have the potential to be used against the migrants. In the following I will discuss some areas of service delivery that can be improved because of incorporation of migration in CRVS. These are recruitment of workers, regularizing the *dalal* system, death and accidents of workers and compensation, reintegration of returnee workers, verification of educational as well as criminal records, if any, of the migrants. The employers can also verify the records of migrants before employing them. In addition, the CRVS may also come handy for Bangladeshi migrants in emergency situations.

Recruitment of workers and regularizing the *dalal* system

As per 2013 law only licensed recruiting agencies are allowed to recruit workers from the grassroots. A recent RMMRU Household census (2017) of 5400 households has shown that only 7% of the migrants have migrated for work through recruiting agencies and the rest of the workers migrated through *dalals*. Since the *dalals* are not allowed to perform recruitment the whole business is done informally. Many of them provide good services to the migrants. Migration may not be possible without these *dalals* as recruiting agencies or government do not have any other means to recruit workers. The same study shows that 19% of the aspirant migrants could not migrate even after paying Tk. 200,000 on an average. The *dalals* and recruiting agencies blame each other and get away by committing such fraud. Based on the findings of this study, RMMRU is now recommending for regularizing the *dalals*. CRVS system can be used in ensuring the IDs of these *dalals*. Awareness campaign needs to be undertaken to inform the potential migrant HHs to keep a photocopy of the national ID of the *dalals* so that when they commit fraud they can be brought under the purview of legal redress.

Verification of educational as well as criminal records

The employers of internal migrants in Bangladesh as well as of international migrants in the countries of destination can hardly verify the records that are provided by the recruiting agencies. CRVS information system on birth and education will give good opportunity to the employers to verify the documents. The labour receiving countries of from Middle-East and Southeast Asian countries complain that a small section of migrants have previous criminal record. According to them, BMET does not properly verify the past record of the aspirant migrants. BMET also claims that such verification process takes a long time. In the process work visa issued to the migrants may expire. CRVS model can help BMET to verify quickly.

Death, Injury and Compensation

A number of Bangladeshi migrants meet untimely death in the countries of destination. Workload, poor living conditions and stress have been identified as reasons for such deaths. Also, each year

thousands of workers are injured in workplaces and roads. In many instances lack of proper documentation delay the repatriation of their bodies. It also works as major impediment for the injured workers and the families of deceased workers to secure compensation. The Wage Earners Welfare Board (WEWB) of the

Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment sources inform that Bangladesh received 33,000 bodies of migrant workers since 2005. In the first 11 months of this year, 3,154 bodies of migrant workers were received. The CRVS can expedite the processes of repatriation of bodies and securing compensation for injury and death.

Reintegration of returnee workers

In Bangladesh there is hardly any reintegration programme from the returnee migrants. At this stage, there is no data of the returnee migrants. This works as major hindrance in the process of reintegration of these workers. The skills that migrants gain while working in the country of destination some time get wasted as domestic entrepreneurs cannot access them because of lack of data on them. Researchers also face problem in identifying returnee migrants when they want to study in long term impact of migration. CRVS model can be used in accessing the returnee migrants.

Migrants in emergency situation

Migration is a complex process. Many migrants due to no fault of their own become undocumented in the countries of destination². In a regular situation their passports are confiscated, some are forced to sign new job contracts with lower wages and rights. Under such conditions some flee workplace and become undocumented in a country where they face jail and deportation. The CRVS data can help this group of workers to establish their identity and secure redress. In the recent past, Bangladeshi migrants have experienced war and civil war in their countries of destination. During this period, in many instances it becomes difficult for them to furnish documentation and this leads to situations of them being stranded. The CRVS provides scope for Bangladesh government to come to their support.

Conclusion

Incorporation of migration in vital statistics is very significant. This can be treated as recognition of migration as an important indicator of social and economic well being. Dividing the data into migrant and non migrant HHs, it will be possible to study the impact of migration on poverty, development, health and other wellbeing. Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment and BMET can utilize CRVS data in governing migration. The private sector can use such information in tapping the expertise of returnee migrants. It can be effectively used in helping migrants during emergency situation and also in establishing rights of migrants in case of dispute between migrants and employers.

² 4th Conference of African Ministers responsible for Civil Registration Experts Meeting, Nouakchott, 4-8 December 2017.