



## INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT: A BANGLADESH PERSPECTIVE

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### **Abstract:**

Migration and development are closely associated issues for many years in the social studies because of their enormous socio-economic impacts both for the country of origin as well as the country of destination. It is as both an income maximization and risk minimization decision. International migration is a promising livelihood option for a developing country like Bangladesh which has myriad of development initiatives from migrants' experiences and remittances. This review article provides a brief discussion on the diasporas' movement, remittances and their contribution to socio-economic development of Bangladesh. International migration has contributed to the development of Bangladesh at the individual, community and national levels. Remittance has a significant effect on the welfare of migrants' household as well as GDP, balance of payments and foreign exchange earnings of Bangladesh. It is greater than foreign aid and foreign direct investment (FDI). It should be ensured for appropriate utilization of migrants' experiences for the micro and macro level development of Bangladesh, an emerging tiger of south Asia in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Keywords:** international migration, development, remittance, expatriate workers

Migration is as old as human history. It continues to reform nations, cultures and the way of life of a large number of people globally. In general, human migration is the movement of people from their birth place to an alternative place for purposes of permanent or temporary residence or employment. According to International Organization for Migration (IOM), migration means people's movement, whatever its reasons, length or composition; it includes refugees, displaced people, and economic migrants (Perruchoud, 2004).

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Migration may be either national or international. International migration has become a widespread global phenomenon. In recent years, migration is not only treated as movement of people from one place to another, but also considered as a development tool for countries of origin and destination alike. According to the World Migration Report 2018, it was projected that 244 million international migrants comprised 3.3% of the world's population in 2015 (Marie McAuliffe, 2017).

Traditionally, migration was seen as a problem with negative implications for development. Today, there is a growing recognition that migration and migrants can enhance a country's development. Migrants are expected to contribute to the development of their countries of host and origin, their families and communities at home through the remittance of financial, human and social capital as well as business activities (Koppenberg, 2011). Recently, migration has created a vast opportunity for poverty reduction, women's empowerment, income generation. It not only enhances social status, security and livelihood but also ensures technological and ideological expansion. Moreover, it increases investments in education, health and sanitation at the household level, and enhances central bank reserves and brain circulation. Since the end of 1980s, it was considered very positively about the linkage between migration and development.

In September 2015, the UN General Assembly with the presence of leaders from 193 countries adopted the Sustainable Development Goals for transforming the world (UN, 2015). Moreover, in the SDGs, migration is not only considered an essential contributor to sustainable development but also recognized as a development tool for the first time in the mainstream global development landscape (IOM, 2017).

## 2. Literature Review

Bangladesh, a small deltaic country, is located in the north-eastern part of South Asia and covers an area of 148,460 square kilometres (CIA, 2018). The country has a population of about 158.9 million as of July 2015, with a corresponding population density of 1077 people per square kilometre (BBS, 2017). She possesses one of the highest population densities in the world, exceeded only by the Singapore and Hong Kong. Bangladesh ranks 140<sup>th</sup> among nations on the Human Development Index as presented in the 2016 Human Development Report (UNDP, 2016). The country struggles to emerge from poverty. According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, the Per Capita Income was US\$1465 during the FY2015-2016 (BBS, 2017). In 2014, the World Bank identified Bangladesh as a Low Middle Income Country (WorldBank, 2016). The World Factbook of CIA shows that the total dependency ratio in Bangladesh is 52.6%, whereas youth dependency ratio is 44.9% (CIA, 2018). As a result, Bangladesh faces formidable challenges to provide adequate job facilities for her job-seeker citizens.

A high population within a small territory creates huge problems for sustainable development for the country. Though Bangladesh is known as a labour surplus country, most of them are unskilled or semi-skilled. She can't postulate work amenities to a great number of half-skilled even skilled workers. Still, Bangladesh is a poor

country with a few prospects for employment. Every year over 2 million people join the job market. So, people are trying to go abroad for their work and better future.

Bangladesh Government records illustrate that, in 1976, a total of 6087 Bangladeshi moved for Overseas Employment for the first time after getting independence in 16 December 1971 (BMET, 2018). In 2017, more than one million migrants crossed the country's border legally (BMET, 2018). Today, a huge number of Bangladeshi professionals, students and workers live, study and work in more than 162 countries across the globe since the mid-1970s. With a large number of International labour migrants in every corner of the world, Bangladesh is now well familiar globally. The Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations reported about 'International Migration Stock 2017'.

The top five countries are given below (UN, 2018):

**Table 1:** International Migration Stock in 2017

<b>Country</b>	<b>Migration Stock</b>
India	16.6 Million
Mexico	13.0 Million
Russia	10.6 Million
China	10.0 Million
Bangladesh	07.5 Million

The country has a long history of international migration and overseas remittances. In 1942, some workers mainly from Sylhet region migrated to the port cities of London and Liverpool in the UK (Mahamud, 1991).

After getting Independence on 16 December of 1971, diasporas' movement grew gradually. Middle East was become main destination for many Bangladeshi migrants when oil price was increased in the 1970s. Later on, it was expanded to the South East Asia's newly industrialized countries like Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea, Hong Kong. Short-term labour migration started in the mid-1970s and steadily increased between 1980s and 2000s. But a sharp increase was seen in 2005 and in recent years. On average more than half a million people go abroad annually for both long-term and short-term employment (BMET, 2018).

Labour migration from Bangladesh was geared furthermore for the government of Bangladesh promoting international labour migration as part of an overall development plan since 1976. Recently two types of international voluntary migration are seen in Bangladesh; (1) industrialized western countries, and (2) Middle Eastern and South East Asian countries. With the passage of time, international migration became part of the economic, social and political fabric of the country.

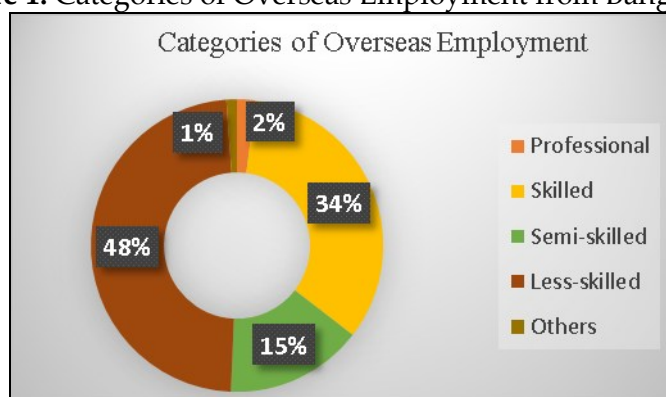
The following table shows the growing number of international migrants from Bangladesh (BMET, 2018):

**Table 2: International Migrants from Bangladesh**

Year	Total	Year	Total
1976	6,087	2005	252,702
1990	103,814	2010	390,702
1995	187,543	2015	555,881
2000	222,256	2017	1,008,518

Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET), Bangladesh has classified expatriate’s workers from Bangladesh into five categories: professional, skilled, semi-skilled, less-skilled and others. The chart below demonstrates the categories of overseas employment from 1976 to 2017 (BMET, 2018):

**Figure 1: Categories of Overseas Employment from Bangladesh**



It is clear that close to 50% of total migrant workers are less-skilled (labours/workers, cleaners, housemaid etc). The professional workers (professors/teachers, engineers, doctors/nurses etc.) are only 2% of the total overseas employment. Skilled workers (manufacturing or garments workers) are 34% and semi-skilled (tailors, mason etc.) migrants are 15% of the total overseas employment. Recently, The Government of Bangladesh is more conscious to improve worker’s proficiency before going abroad. Most of the Bangladeshi migrants in overseas are temporary labour. The Gulf and South East Asian countries, they work in petroleum refineries as well as different manufacturing companies.

Increasingly, Bangladeshi labourers discover themselves as a construction worker, worker in a dates, rubber or palm garden, as a car driver, security forces, as a cleaner, domestic worker etc. Some are involved in service sectors, very little in agriculture. In most of the western countries, Bangladeshi migrants engage in hotel or restaurant business, halal food shop, travel agency, taxi driver, calling card trade etc. There are some other professionals such as doctor, nurse, technician, engineer, professor, businessman or property owners. Many of them became permanent residents, getting citizenship of different countries especially in western world for example UK, USA, Australia, Canada etc. And the, second or third generation of these migrant families are taking part in local politics and even in national government.

### **3. Methodology**

In this study, all data and information are collected from credible secondary sources- includes journal and newspaper articles, books, Bangladesh Government's sources, international organization's especially International Organization for Migration (IOM) and United Nations (UN) publications and reports and internet databases. We have employed the content analysis method for getting reliable findings and outcomes. To thoroughly understand the subject matters, we made a robust discussion of the relevant literatures. No theoretical framework has been used to conduct the study.

### **4. Result and Discussion**

Due to continuous movement of Bangladeshi emigrants across the globe, some influential aftermaths are observed in this study. Migration is an important and beneficial livelihood option for Bangladesh who has a countless development experiences from migrants' behaviours. It has not only been reducing domestic unemployment, it has also encouraged socio-economic development possibilities at the national, community and individual levels. Basically, migration is one kind of business. When goods are sent to abroad or different places from its origin, its price increases and profit is earned this way. Similarly, if man or woman sells himself/herself in overseas job market, he/she will be benefited like a businessman.

#### **4.1 Migration Impact on Family or Household**

Migration has numerous micro level effects on family or household. Most of the Bangladeshi migrants are temporary labour which is the predominant type of migration found in Asia, whereby millions of left- behind families maintaining a better living in their home countries by receiving remittance. Remittances sent by Bangladeshi expatriates make a significant contribution towards accelerating economic and social development of their families. For a large number of rural households, remittances are a major source of earning to guarantee subsistence, with empirical studies revealing that remittances constituted half of the total income of these rural households (Hear, Bakewell & Long, 2012). Many recipient families escape extreme poverty, at least marginally.

A study conducted at the beginning of the decade looking at migrants from Bangladesh, put the proportion of families economically benefiting at a figure of 56%, with 26.5% as losing and some 15.5% unclear (Siddiqui, 2001). Most of them send remittance mainly to their family members' alike wife, parents, brothers, sisters and relatives. The amount of money does not remain the same; it varies from time to time. In the pre-migration period, it is found by using HCI (Head Count Index) that 21% of the migrant households were moderately poor, but it was reduced dramatically to 7% in the post-migration period (N. Islam, 2011). So, remittance raises the annual household income at the micro level.

Different studies show that high-skilled migrants have less connection to their home country, whereas, less-skilled or semi -skilled labours have strong ties to families. They send a significant amount of remittances to their beloved families in Bangladesh. The pattern of expenditure of the Bangladeshi expatriates abroad was divided in the following categories (M. N. Islam, 2011):

**Table 3:** Pattern of Expenditure of Remittances

Outline of Expenses	Percentage
Personal consumption	29.8%
Send remittances to back home	44.9%
Save for future	22.8%
Others	2.5%

Generally, remittances are used for various productive, investment and consumption purposes. Different literatures demonstrate that remittances are mostly used for direct consumption of the family members. For example, remittance increases the ability of families to purchase food, clothes, furniture and medicine (Tasneem Siddiqui & Abrar, 2003). Remittance encourages pecuniary conditions of recipient family and boosts their living standard. For instance, it assists them expanding their daily food intake, eating quality food, taking good care of their health, and sending their children to better educational institutes with adequate learning materials. Some of the initial uses of remittances are settling down debt, and procuring land and shopper durables (Mahmood, 1991). The following table expresses the uses of remittances:

**Table 4:** Way of Expenditure of Remittances

Avenue of Expenditure	Rank
Family daily needs (Consumption)	1
Payment of Loans, construction	2
Education, Health, Purchase of Land	3
Savings, Investment in Business	4

\*1 stands for high and 4 stands for low (The writers' findings of this study)

But for this, in some cases, remittance modifies family structure and extends to form a nuclear family. In rural areas of Bangladesh, joint families are predominant in most places. It is known from many studies that sometimes remittances are not enough for all household members. There is a limited chance of improving amenities to all. Under these conditions, joint families may turn into nuclear families with the purpose of enhancing civic facilities through the movement to adjacent town areas. Needless to say, the change depends on who receives remittances directly, whether it is migrants' wife or not.

## 4.2 Empowering Women

Any decision on what sector remittances would be utilized for is an important issue for migrants' families. Bangladesh is a traditional country where society or family is governed by patriarchy. It has a long practice over centuries. Recently, tradition has

been partly changed gradually for international migrant's remittances. Women have more freedom to use remittances for their family's well-being. The gendered nature of families has been modified slowly due to remittance utilization. In the absence of a family guardian or father, the mother or woman deals with the money. This is one of the major achievements for Bangladesh. Maruf states, "*Migration of male labour affects the status and decision-making role of woman left behind*" (Maruf, 2012).

#### **4.3 Participating in Local Politics**

Migrants' family members enjoy a lot of opportunities and amenities from remittances. The family's changing economic status as well as life style enhances social recognition within the community. This helps migrant family members to get access to local political organizations (Sabur and Mahmud, 2008).

Moreover, migrant people take part in politics in destination countries. Meanwhile, many Bangladeshi expatriates become involved in politics in different countries across the globe. Sometimes, they enjoy dual citizenships and live in both countries at their convenience. Immigrants have created new transnational identities like British-Bangladeshi, Bangladeshi-American, Bangladeshi-Canadian, Bangladeshi-Australian etc.

#### **4.4 Returnee Migrants and Investments**

Many Bangladeshi expatriate workers like other foreign labours return to their home country after enjoying contract-based employment abroad. Sometimes, expatriate workers fall in danger due to a destination country's political turmoil. In this condition, migrant labours return home against their will. The returnee migrants attempt tooth and nail to establish a safe and profitable investment. Accordingly, proper utilization of remittance is very crucial for returnee migrants.

Various studies mention, in Bangladesh, migrant workers like to invest in all kinds of lands-homestead, cultivable or commercial etc. (Murshid, Iqbal, & Ahmed, 2002). Apart from this, in some cases remittances help to release mortgaged out land; and it is also quite important in the rural context as it re-establishes the right of the person to cultivate the land. However, sending other family members abroad is another vital investment of these families.

#### **4.5 Migration Impact on Society**

Migration has a remarkably positive impact on social development and empowerment through skill transfer and by fostering many community development initiatives. Society receives influences from the migrant and his/her family's cumulative activities. So, international migration has direct and indirect influences on the society of Bangladesh. According to BMET (2018), mainly construction, agriculture, manufacturing, transport, services and social infrastructures are sectors which benefit highly from migrants' remittances.

Sometimes, migrant people invest in housing construction or in small businesses such as setting up of grocery shops, procuring of sewing machines, even finance in

mobile accessories or laptop/computer/ photocopier shops to promote job facilities for local people as well as stimulate the demand for local products. When demand increases for certain products at the local level, it often relates to the overseas remittances.

However, Bangladeshi expatriate workers spend their remittances frequently in community development activities including gifts or donations to near and dear ones, same faith based religious organizations, charity and helping victims of any kinds of disasters (Murshid et al., 2002). For the infrastructural development, lower case for mosques and madrassas receive a big amount from foreign workers (Tasneem Siddiqui & Abrar, 2003). More importantly, remittance is used to alleviate poverty. It also assists in sustaining subsistence within one's kinship networks. Moreover, it is also used in other social development, such as education, health, and infrastructure (Najam, 2007). Likewise, remittance has positive impacts on aged people for their social security. Remittance ensures parental support and acts as a social security resource base for the elderly in Bangladesh (Kuhn, 2001). Last but not the least, migrants subsidize to the creation of social capital for social welfare activities by using their remittances for example, building schools, mosques, madrasses (Islamic school), developing infrastructure, facilitating drinkable water and sanitation at local isolated places, providing sports materials to youths etc.

#### **4.6 Migration Impact on Culture**

When a person goes abroad and starts to live there, she acquires some new ideas, knowledge, norms and values from a different society. These experiences transform his food habits, tastes, motivations and as a whole change his way of life. It inspires migrant's family members to share foreign cultures among them. Remittance plays a key role in shaping the values of life through buying modern technology such as television, computer, laptop, smart mobile phone, refrigerator, air con, motor cycle, car or home appliances (Stevanovic, 2012). Thus, international migration helps migrant families to come up with latest improved civic amenities and introduces them to a new civilization. This change affects the indigenous culture of Bangladesh. Specifically, high-skilled migrants and their families become accustomed to alien cultures more rapidly than less-skilled expatriate workers.

But for this, migrant families send their children to renowned schools, predominantly English-medium schools with modern equipment. As a result, children find themselves in multicultural environments which facilitates better understanding and higher educational attainment. On the other hand, familiarisation with the modern norms and values can create cultural conflicts between new generation and older generation. Primarily, elderly people keep their traditional values instead of new ones. Moreover, cultural conflict depends on family understanding and education level. Some families practice both cultures but obviously receive only positive dimensions.



#### **4.7 Migration Impact on National Economy**

Studies from different scholars and organizations show that international migration facilitates a dynamic role in the national economy of Bangladesh mainly in two major ways:

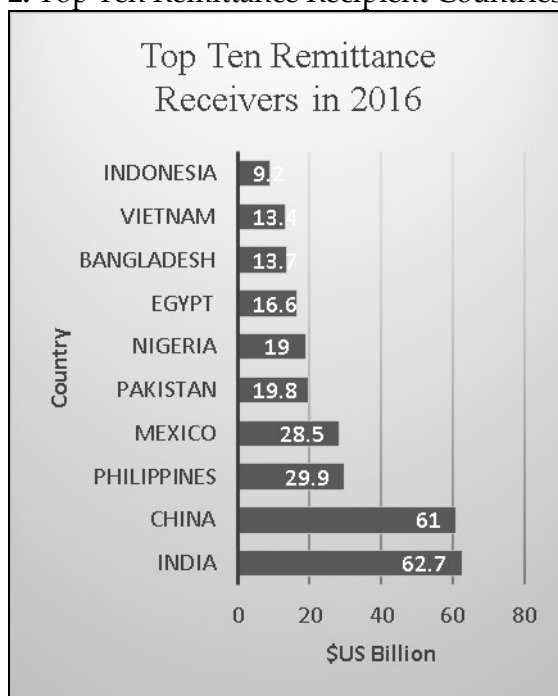
- A. Firstly, international migration decreases unemployment and poverty
- B. Secondly, migration outcomes in remittance flows for the country

The increasing job opportunities abroad, higher wages and growing levels of remittances are likely a robust contributing force in Bangladesh's remarkable record of poverty reduction. A World Bank report recently linked 6 percent poverty cut in Bangladesh in 2006 for migration (WorldBank, 2006). The 6th Five Year Plan of Bangladesh stated that the poverty level of international migrant producing areas is less than the non-migrant ones (Siddiqui, 2012).

Overseas migration creates vast opportunities for frustrated unemployed workers, and stimulates economic growth (Hadi, 1999). The World Bank appreciated Bangladesh for reducing poverty rate to 18.5% in 2010 from 44.2% in 1991; in 2016, the rate plummeted to 12.9% (Kim, 2016). The World Bank expects that Bangladesh will be free from extreme poverty by 2030. Needless to say, international migration will be a robust determinant of plummeting poverty from Bangladesh.

Remittance is an integral part of international migration. It constitutes the second largest financial inflow for many developing countries, exceeding international aid. It contributes to economic growth and the livelihood of people worldwide. In Bangladesh, remittance is one of the most important economic variables in recent times as it helps in addressing the balance of payments, increasing foreign exchange reserves, enhancing national savings and velocity of money, and reducing the influence of development partners at policy level. She has experienced a sharp increase in remittances during the past two and half decades. The World Bank Group KNOMAD's 'Migration and Development Brief 27' states that Bangladesh is one of the top 10 remittance recipient countries globally (WorldBank, 2017).

**Figure 2: Top Ten Remittance Recipient Countries in 2016**



‘Bangladesh Economic Update 2014’ states the rising relation between country’s remittance and export/GDP (Onneshan, 2014).

**Table 5: Relation of Remittance & GDP/Export**

FY	Remittance as % of Export	Remittance as % of GDP
2005-2006	45.62	7.76
2006-2007	49.09	8.74
2007-2008	56.09	9.95
2008-2009	62.36	10.85
2009-2010	67.80	10.95
2010-2011	50.81	10.42
2011-2012	52.85	11.09
2012-2013	53.51	11.14

The remittances not only enhance GDP but also elevate the standard of living of millions of families and relatives dependent on expatriate workers. Moreover, it is greater than foreign direct investment (FDI) in Bangladesh. In 2017, net inflow of FDI stood at US\$ 2.15 (Kibria, 2018). Remittance has gained momentum in recent times in Bangladesh and is now the second largest sector of foreign exchange earnings after the garments sector (Rahman & Rahman, 2008). If the cost of imported raw materials is deducted from the foreign exchange earning of the garments sector, remittance becomes the single largest sector of foreign exchange earnings. Inflow of remittance is given below (BB, 2018):

**Table 6:** Trend of Remittances Inflow

Year	Remittance (\$US Billion)
2013	\$14.4b
2014	\$15.8b
2015	\$15.3b
2016	\$13.7b
2017	\$12.7b

The share of remittance in GNI (Gross National Income) is increasing day by day. It affects almost all the macro-economic indicators of a country positively. As a result, remittance has created a new dimension in the economic as well as social development of Bangladesh. Adams and Page empirically demonstrated that international migration can be positively linked to a decline in the number of people living in poverty (Adams Jr, Cuecuecha, & Page, 2008). At present, remittance is treated as a poverty-alleviating tool. It helps to achieve the target of migration related SDGs through the proper guidance of the government. It is now well accepted that one of routes to achieve economic emancipation for Bangladesh lies in the labour export sector. However, remittances have been causing a silent economic revolution in Bangladesh.

#### **4.8 Some Negative Impacts of Migration**

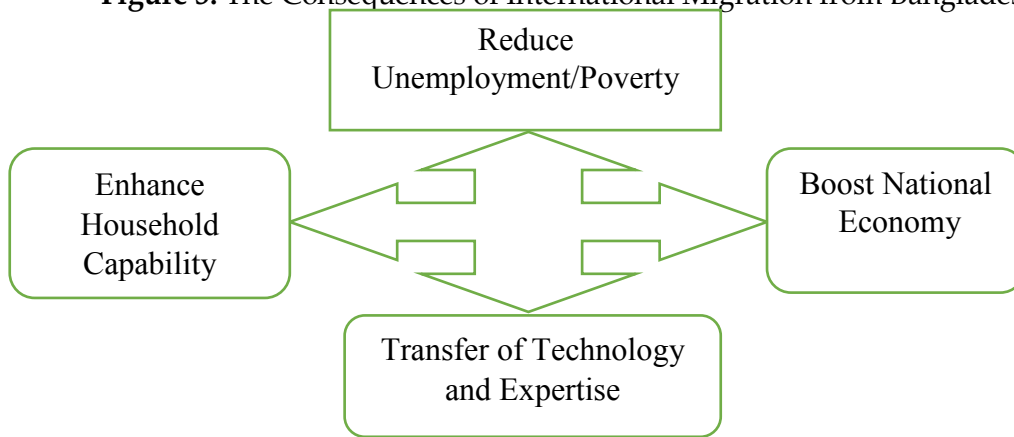
Migration has also a few negative impacts on families, society and at the national level. Sometimes, migrant workers leave their spouse due to his/her long absence and wed again. The study also finds other negative implications like misuses of remittances, broken families and lack of parenting for children. According to Ahmed, remittance recipient household members become more dependent on the transnational migrants (Ahmed, 2012). This dependency, however, makes them indifferent to productive activities. In addition, these types of apathetic families face severe problems, if political or economic crises arise in destination countries. An abrupt intermission in sending money can have a troublesome impact on local economies and families (Stevanovic, 2012).

Chowdhury shows, how the inflow of remittance can create a social gap between remittance receiving and non-receiving families (Chowdhury, 1992). Even, when remittances are used to procure land, the price of land upsurges unexpectedly (De Haan, 1999). Therefore, in some cases, remittance generates inequality in society among poor people who do not have expatriate workers and thus access to services may be restricted for them.

#### **4.9 At a Glance: The Significances of International Migration**

International migration from Bangladesh smooths the following benefits:

**Figure 3:** The Consequences of International Migration from Bangladesh



## 5. Recommendations

This study recommends the following actions:

1. Lessening the migration cost to rationalize overseas employment.
2. Making data bank for understanding real job opportunities and capabilities.
3. Decreasing interest rate to deter than informal channels for sending remittances.
4. Arranging proper training for men and women to create skilled manpower.
5. Raising awareness activities for safe migration and to prevent human trafficking.
6. Strengthening the labour wings of foreign missions of Bangladesh for ensuring rights and welfare of the expatriate workers.
7. Encouraging government to government recruitment to prevent unlawful immigration.
8. Rehabilitating the exploited migrants with the help of international organization.
9. Improving the relations with NGOs and Civil Societies to build awareness of migrant workers issues.
10. Arranging compulsory vocational/technical training with language proficiency in some selected foreign languages to promote overseas employment.
11. Explore new ways to utilize remittances for getting maximum benefits.

## 6. Conclusions

International migration has become an important livelihood strategy for the people of Bangladesh. It permits households to increase their consumption of local goods and services. Remittances are indeed contributing to improving the quality of lives of migrants' households. At the community level, remittances cause dimensional effects in the local economy, creating jobs and stimulating new economic and social infrastructure and services. It has a powerful effect on macro and micro levels of the country. At a national level, it boosts the economy from all sides. After all, as a developing country, Bangladesh has benefited mostly from international migration and remittances. Because, most of the Bangladeshi diasporas are 'Economic Migrant'.

Nevertheless, Bangladesh still receives a lower amount of remittances compared to the number of the national working abroad. Compared to the other labour-sending countries, the number of Bangladesh migrants is smaller, mostly short term in employment, less skilled in working performance and low paid. Informal remittance transfer has long been seen as a strong barrier to receiving remittances in full swing. So, there are various issues and challenges that have been highlighted in this review paper that need to be urgently addressed so that migrant workers and the country as a whole can maximize the gains from migration and remittances for the sustainable development of Bangladesh.

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