

# Report on "Remittances and Expatriates: Development of Bangladesh" Venue: Bel Air Hotel, Den Haag 22-04-06

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- 1) The event started with registration, coffee and snacks which took place between 12.30 and 13.00.
- 2) **"The Welcome speech" is given by the President of BASUG, Mr. Bikash Chowdhury Barua.:-**

He says couple of words about the subject of the conference, the remittances and its importance for the development of the developing countries including Bangladesh. He mentions that participants from different countries such as Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Belgium, Philippines, UK, Romania, etc are present in the forum. He also mentions the three projects which BASUG is running now in three locations in Bangladesh (Hobiganj, Laksham and Chittagong).

These projects according to him are for the poor children and aimed at the economic development of the poor women through micro-credit programme and sewing & handicraft projects. One of the projects was initiated by a 71- year old Dutch lady,



Ms. Sona Brunott who also participated in the conference. Usually the money for projects is sent directly to Bangladesh and it is managed by BASUG's local partner organization over there. In the end of Mr. Bikash Chowdhury Barua's address, he thanks all the people who made possible for this event to take place, specially Ms. Leila Rispens-Noel of Oxfam-Novib for her support which lasts for more than one year.

- 3) The second speaker is the chief guest, **Ms. Ismat Jahan, HE the Ambassador of Bangladesh in the Netherlands.:-**

She also emphasizes the importance of the remittances for the economic development as a resource for both countries: Bangladesh as a recipient country and the Netherlands as a host country for 2000-3000 Bangladesh people (according to official statistics). She hopes by the end of the day, some conclusions and recommendations will come up in the form of "plan of action". She says that movement of people makes improvements of the civilization; but nowadays, the South to North movement is becoming more and more restrictive.



The ambassador adds, for Bangladesh the remittances flow started in the '70 when first cheap labor forces started to be used in more developed countries. Bangladesh is one of the "top 10" countries getting remittances; the most used channel to send money home by people of Bangladesh is "hundi", the informal channel; all over the world there are 4 million people from Bangladesh sending money back home. Most of those people are working in

USA, South Arabia or Kuwait, mostly in Middle East and they are engaged on agricultural activities. The officials of Bangladesh – the State, encourages people to go abroad via official channels and for that reason they are organizing recruiting agencies and are promoting special programmes. The Ambassador also mentions the lack of investments in human resources in Bangladesh in comparison with India or other neighboring countries which are benefiting of sending well education people abroad bringing more revenue for those countries. She highlights the efforts of the State to educate and train the people before sending them abroad. “The Ministry for Expatriates and Overseas Employees” in Bangladesh, in charge with remittances, is encouraging people to send money home via official channels. Money is tax free if it is sent via official ways/banks, she adds. In general,

money is sent to cover the basic needs of the families and for some small investments such as buying some piece of land or houses.

She raises some questions which are supposed to be answered by the end of the conference:

“What is the impact of the remittances?”,

“What should be the initiatives of the State and authorities?”

“What are the major opportunities of the remittances”.



She considers it would be of very much help if remittances would be used for charity and community development: remittances would have a larger impact, at the community level, not at the individual level. She hopes at the end of the day to have some answers to the question: “What can be done more in order to increase the quality of life of people back home by using remittances?”. The Ambassador ends her speech with a quotation from the most famous Bengali poet, Rabindranath Tagore.



After her speech, there is one question from the audience (Dr. Ahmed Ziauddin) regarding the UN Convention of migration: “Why Bangladesh didn’t sign it and it is not ready to do it?”

She doesn’t have an official answer, only some of her own speculations which she doesn’t want to make public/share in front of the audience. Yet she says that in general to do something takes a lot of time and in particular the

Convention is not yet attractive for many countries. She thinks that more important is for the hosting countries (countries in Middle East) to sign it, but they haven’t done it yet.

#### 4) Videos/activities/slides carried on by BASUG in Bangladesh:-

- a) “Sona Sewing and Handicraft Project”: it is a training, free-of-charge for the poor women and girls of a remote village, North Purangar, Satkania in Chittagong district. Partner organization in Bangladesh, Everbright Foundation is implementing this project with the fund from BASUG;
- b) “Medical Service Center” will be set up according to the Director of the Everbright Foundation.

5) *“Seva Programme in Surinam”, the speech is given by Dr. Radj Bhondoe, Director of Seva Network Foundation:-*



He underlines the importance of the remittances for the development; an important amount of money is sent annually back home by expatriates, but unfortunately the communities are not organized and not able to influence the policy of governments and development agencies such as Oxfam-Novib, ICCO, CORDAID, etc.

He adds, in the past the situation was quite bad, in the sense that 80 development organizations showed no interest for a coherent policy towards migrants and expatriates. Three years ago the atmosphere was quite pessimistic within the development agencies sphere, as regards to remittances; in his opinion the mood was like this: “give us money, and we will use the money in your countries”. But the mood changed and the migrant communities are starting to organize themselves, and moreover, they start to be recognized by the development agencies. So, people/migrants are organizing themselves more and more and they have platforms and programs. The Ministry of Development and Cooperation in the Netherlands is not encouraging too much this trend, but steps are starting to be made.

Reports of UNDP and World Bank state that the flow of remittances is substantial; they are rapidly increasing and have a great contribution to the employment. There are also reports from other countries such as India, China, Mexico and Ghana, countries where remittances play a crucial role, stating that the economy is growing due to the remittances; the situation is starting to improve in Bangladesh as well where reports are appearing; in his opinion migrants are the drivers of change.

Development Agencies currently are organizing in the Netherlands different activities having as a topic migrants and their role; Mr. Radj Bhondoe’s opinion is that there is too much talking and too little action.

Seva Network Foundation is founding different projects in countries in the Third World, specially in Surinam. One way of encouraging projects is using the “Matching grant” (1/2 of the amount of money is coming from the initiator and 1/2 is coming from Seva), in this way Seva is trying to encourage the sustainability for a project and to create responsibility for using that amount of money. Another way



of promoting projects is to convince the person who wants to send money back home to let Seva gather the money for one year, for instance, and that amount of money to be invested in the country of origin, Surinam, for production activities and finally the money will reach those families for which the money was meant.

The conclusions of the speaker are as following:

- √ As regards to the Millennium Development Goals (MDG): does the government in the Netherlands realize fully the role of the migrants to help accomplish the MDG? What policy measures is the government going to implement?
- √ Do Development Agencies realize what they will do to bring migrant communities together?
- √ Do migrant communities understand their potential to help their people in their countries of origin?

A prediction is made by Dr Radj Bhondoe: the whole scene of the development in the Netherlands will be changed and migrant communities will play an essential role in the policy process.

**6) “The Link between Migration and Development: Novib and Diaspora, organizations as partners in development”: Ms. Leila Rispens-Noel, Programme Officer of Oxfam-Novib:-**

This occasion is for Ms. Rispens-Noel the first time when she is taking part for an event organized by the Bangladesh community in the Netherlands. In her short presentation she discusses about the link between migration and development: on the one hand, migration is a very complex topic which has its own costs and benefits; on the other hand development has different understandings depending on what “part of the table” somebody is. In her opinion, the remittances are going mostly for basic consumption of the families; those who migrated are, in her estimation, not the poorest ones, because those who are poor do not have the money to travel and also they not have the capacity to leave the country.

One important issue raised by Ms. Rispens-Noel was how to maximize the potential of the



remittances; some suggestions are as following: reduce the costs of sending remittances home, continued sustained advocacy, making use of and encouraging matching funds (in case of Mexico, one US \$ gave by an expatriate was corresponding to one US \$ gave by the state, the local authority and the federal authority each), stimulate savings (use money productively, make investments in the country of origin), use micro finance

institutions (rural and commercial banks) and initiate philanthropy activities by the Diaspora.

Another suggestion from her side was to initiate Home Town Associations: the initiative of developing projects and making use of the money the best way should come from the community itself, these projects should reflect the needs of the community; in this way the sustainability of the project is ensured and it will be replicated by other communities in the future.

According to her experience, there are also some obstacles which harm the activities of migrant organizations: lack of unity among Diaspora organizations (there are too many, with different views and objectives); these organizations need capacity building (Novib is organizing and workshops for them periodically on different themes); “HIRDA” is a good example of a long lasting and fruitful collaboration with Novib. Her advice to migrant organizations is to prioritize, to have 2-3 goals and to focus on those only and not to lose the main goal. Migrant organizations should look on their strengths and to focus on them and to make sure that they are going in the

same direction. It is good to have different goals, but it is important to have the same direction. Ms. Leila Rispens-Noel ends her contribution to the conference with a Philippines saying: “in union there is strength”.

7) ***“Contribution of European Bangladeshis towards the economic development of Bangladesh”, speech given by Mr. Ansar Ahmed Ullah, Co-Convener, UK based European Bangladeshi Forum, a network of Bangladeshi Europeans:-***



The UK Bangladeshi community is may be the oldest one in Europe; in the '40s first people came to England, but the first big influx was in the '50s when England needed cheap labor forces, there were mostly men. Their purpose was to get some money and afterwards to return to their home country. But it didn't happen, and step by step they brought their families as well. This family reuniting took place after the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, when a large flux of people came to England (wives and children). During his contribution Mr. Ullah gave a short overview of the Bangladesh community's history in England.

Along the years, this community supported in different ways its country: it founded the first bank in Bangladesh; it supports the national flight company, different investments in infrastructure. Some of the people invested in business projects, such as sea-food. More information about projects carried out by the Bangladesh community in UK will be provided in the form of a paper and it will circulate via the website of BASUG.

In the whole Europe, it is estimated that there are 500.000 Bangladeshi people which represent a huge asset and which was overlooked by Bangladeshi government. The speaker makes a recommendation to BASUG: if BASUG is going to work more in the area of business projects, it could represent a catalyst for promoting project for business development in Bangladesh.

8) ***“Migrants micro savings advocacy for local economic development”, speech given by Dr. Corazon Dee, Chairperson ERCMOVE – Economic Resource Centre for Migrants & Overseas Employees, the Netherlands:-***

Dr. Corazon Dee presents “micro savings and micro investments flow chart” (it will be distributed by BASUG to participants) which was developed by ERCMOVE and which shows the concept used by ERCMOVE working with remittances and migrants. Ms. Dee makes a short introduction of her organization and describes what ERCMOVE is doing for migrants; a short overview of projects carried out by ERCMOVE is presented.



ERCMOVE encourages migrants who are sending money home to invest at least part of them, either directly or via micro finance organizations which can help them to invest money in a proper way. In the next future, ERCMOVE will focus on organizing “economic and financial literacy” training order to teach migrants how to use their money in order to maximize them. Ms. Dee mentions the importance of the policies in both country of origin and the host country. She is member for 2006 of the “Derde

Kamer” (3<sup>rd</sup> Parliament) and her interest participating there, is to promote the interests of migrants in the Netherlands.

Her recommendations are: there is need for seed-capital for micro finance; there is need for seed-capital for post-conflict regions; capacity building – need for well-educated human capital; building partnership with other parties in order to link the gaps.

9) **“Dynamics and utilization of Remittances in Bangladesh”, contribution made by Mr. Tom de Bruijn, representing “Hoger Instituut voor deArbeid”, Katholiek Universiteit in Luven, Belgium:-**



In the beginning of his short speech he mentioned the disadvantage of being the last speaker, when almost everything on the topic was touched. He focuses more on the policy issues, stating that governments in general try to encourage the use of the remittances, reduce the costs of sending money home (referring the one good example in UK where there is a special website with all the necessary information on [www.sendingmoneyhome.org](http://www.sendingmoneyhome.org)). He mentions the need for synergy between microfinance savings, banks/institutions and migrants communities; money is to be used for economic and social development, existing special accounts for specific activities, for instance building houses.

He makes the observation that during his research in Bangladesh, it was difficult to find community development projects organized by migrants communities; he specifies BASUG, but in comparison with other countries such as Philippines or Mexico it is too little.

The last part of the event is dedicated to **“Questions and Answers”** from the audience. The five speakers are going to answer the questions, moderated by Dr. Ahmed Ziauddin, Consultant on International Law, Convener, Asian Network for International Criminal Court.

The speakers are: *Dr. Radj Bhondoe*, Director Seva Network Foundation, *Ms. Leila Rispens-Noel*, Programme Officer Oxfam-Novib, *Mr. Ansar Ahmed Ullah*, Co-convener, UK based European Bangladeshi Forum, *Dr. Corazon Dee*, Chairperson ERCMOVE and *Mr. Tom de Bruijn*, of Hoger Instituut voor deArbeid, Katholiek Universiteit, Luven, Belgium.

a) The first question comes from a participant representing Bangladeshis in Norway (Secretary of Bangladesh Peoples Solidarity Centre, Oslo). -“How remittances, being the main resource for Bangladesh government, guarantee human rights in Bangladesh?” He addresses the question to Mr. *Ansar Ahmed Ullah* and he asks him to give the answer by comparison with democratic rights in UK.



The answer is a common contribution of Mr. *Ansar Ahmed Ullah* and Ms. *Leila Rispens-Noel*. Democracy is connected with human resources and remittances; remittances can contribute to the democratization: if you have money, you have power and in this way you can capture the

political power. Therefore, a strong migrant's community can be influential if it has money. She gives the Mexican example, which has representatives at the governmental level and which is good model of "good governance". One role that the migrant's organizations could play is to convince local representatives to be more transparent and accountable to the civil society.

- b) The second question comes from Drs. Peter Custer (BOOM organization, the Netherlands) as a follow up to the first question: "What are the possibilities of the diasporas to raise awareness at the European level regarding the situation on human rights in Bangladesh?"

The answer comes from Mr. *Ansar Ahmed Ullah*: in England and in Europe in general, there is a large Bangladeshi community, but it is fragmented because of different political views; because of the different political affiliation it is difficult to bring all the people together.

- c) The third question comes from the President of BASUG, Mr. Bikash Chowdhury Barua, addressed to Mr. Radj Bhondoe: "What are the other options for Basug to develop projects based on Seva Network Foundation experience?"

The projects that Seva is carrying out are based on a specific formula, developed along the years in collaboration with Novib, for instance. The method used is specific for Suriname.

- d) The following question comes from ICCO Programme Officer Ms. Nellie van der Pasch addressed to Ms. Cora Dee: "What is ERCMOVE doing for Morocco and Turkish people in the Netherlands?"

ERCMOVE has carried out a pilot-project in Philippines, and is encouraging the others to use the money via microfinance organizations.



- e) Next question is from another participant, addressed to the speakers in general:- "How can young people be encouraged to set up projects while they have too little feeling about their original country?"

The answer is based on an example from Vietnam: it is enough to visit that country in order to get the feeling about the poor people living there, therefore somebody will be motivated to send money in that country.

- f) Next question from a Bangladeshi representing an organization, Expanding Horizon: "What is the situation of the illegal migrants in Europe?"

Their lives may not be better here, but they still continue to work and to send money home. Fight for migrants rights is becoming more difficult nowadays; to send money home using



formal channels requires to be a legal citizen, to have an ID card. Usually people that are sent abroad via official channels are socially not supported or sustained by their government. Regarding Bangladesh, there are only 2 organizations: a women organization and "The Welfare Association for Repatriate People", which are doing lobby for those who were migrants. In this

respect, BASUG should lobby for migrants and their rights in those countries where they are mostly present (Middle East countries).

- g) Another question comes from another participant: “Will there be a decrease in the capacity of doing projects in ten years time?”

The answer is that the long you live in the host country, the less attachment you have for your country of origin. It also depends on how you associate your attachment to your country; it is mostly a personal feeling, so it depends from person to person. For sure the awareness must be raised, and more action should be done in this way. The collective sentiment of being emigrant in Europe is missing, in comparison with the Latin people in USA, who represent a force there. Ms. *Leila Rispens-Noel* suggests that emigrants in Europe should gather together, march on



streets to make the other aware of what migrants and their labor force mean for Europe.

In the end of the discussions, Mr. Ahmed Ziauddin, the moderator of the discussion makes some recommendations and suggests some steps to be made in the future:

- to be organized further events on the issues such as migrants and remittances, which can be replicated in other countries;
- build the network among organizations and use the media (such as newspapers and TV in UK, weekly newspapers in Sweden);
- create awareness as regards to the role of the government in the countries of origin, they should serve the people and not focus on their own importance.



The event was organized under the BASUG logo: “*Together we can make the world a better place to live in*”.