Poverty Research Network Workshop
Conference on
Women, Poverty and Migration
Warwick University, UK
Department of English and Humanities (ENH) and Department of Economics and Social Sciences (ESS)
BRAC University
November 9, 2017
BRAC Centre
75, Bir Uttam AK Khandakar Road, Dhaka 1212
Meeting Room 1

List of Abstracts

First Session
10:20-11:40
Session Moderator   Professor A T M Nurul Amin, Chairperson, ESS, BRAC University

The Words that Govern Us: The Discourse around Women, Poverty and Migration
 Professor Firdous Azim, ENH, BRAC University

This paper aims to cogitate on the power of words and the discursive spaces they form. This is especially true in the case of women, whose spaces are defined and confined by constant references to sexuality. The paper will start by looking at feminist efforts to change the terms that have been used to define women historically and as they enter specific areas of the labour market. It goes on to look at the words that form the terrain of female labour migration, and how the boundaries between migration and trafficking are blurred. Fictional representations are looked at to see how a more nuanced and empowering discourse could be imagined.

An Exploration of Gender Dimensions of Migration and Remittances with a Focus on Bangladesh
Dr Wasiqur Rahman Khan, Associate Professor, ESS, BRAC University

In light of the mounting significance of women as international migrants there have been increasing attempts to bring a gendered perspective to this important socioeconomic phenomenon which was, hitherto, studied in a gender-neutral manner. Bangladesh, interestingly for a conservative Muslim majority country, has experienced over three decades of female out-migration for the purpose of work, alongside other forms of female migration such as spousal accompaniment or forced trafficking. The focus of this paper is on the former. It coalesces the available meagre literature on the issue, tries to identify common themes and examines the unique migration and remittance generating experiences of Bangladeshi women. In particular, information regarding remittance sending and receiving behaviour is highlighted for the cases of Bangladeshi women migrants to the UAE and Malaysia, two migrant worker receiving countries which have received scholarly attention. An attempt is also made to contrast the Bangladeshi scenario with that of other Asian countries such as the Philippines and Indonesia which are the homes of large numbers of female migrant workers. Some policy suggestions are offered and the groundwork laid for a potential empirical investigation of the macroeconomic impact and microeconomic effects of female remittances to Bangladesh.

A Story on Women's Poverty, Migration and Policy: Reflections in the   Context of Bangladesh

Md. Mahbubur Rahman, Research Fellow, Refugee and Migratory Movements Research

This paper entails a story on women's poverty, migration and policy issues. The story synthesizes the reflections of the life experiences of some female migrants who live in slums of Tangail, Bangladesh. It observes the linkages between women's poverty and migration, the contributions of female migrants to local and national economies of Bangladesh, and the protection challenges of female migrants. It analyzes the policy initiatives and chalks out the policy gaps that lead to the failure of protecting female migrants from sexual and gender based violence, and from other sufferings and sorrows. Last but not least, it underscores the urgent need of addressing the human rights concerns of female migrants in order to create a positive link between migration and poverty alleviation, so that the final outcome of migration is resulted into sustainable development.

Second Session
12:00-1:25
Session Moderator   Professor Saira Rahman Khan, School of Law, BRAC University

Mitigating adverse incorporation in global care chains – can the UK Modern Slavery Act 2014 contribute?
Professor Ann Stewart, School of Law, University of Warwick

The passage of the UK Modern Slavery Act (MSA) 2014 represents a significant moment in the 200 year history of campaigning against slavery. It recognises that this pernicious phenomenon persists and is not tucked away in isolated pockets in distant troubled lands. While there is growing recognition, reflected in wider literature, that the exploitation associated with this phenomenon is pervasive, there is far less agreement on its definition, and therefore its reach, and the most appropriate ways in which to tackle its manifestations. This paper adopts a gender perspective to assess the contribution made by the Act, and the various governance frameworks associated with it, to protecting those involved in global care chains. It is now recognised among international policy makers that socially reproductive work (SR) (often narrowed to care work) underpins the operation of global markets. Human rights and gender activists call for a right to care to recognise, reduce and redistribute caring (Elson) reflected now in Sustainable Development Goal 5 target 4. Do the MSA provisions have any role to play in recognising and addressing the exploitation associated with care work particularly that undertaken through migration? The paper distinguishes two modern slavery (MS) approaches, associated with particular stakeholder communities and governance frameworks. An individual vulnerability approach which distinguishes between free and unfree labour seeks to disrupt and eliminate the practice through state sanctions targeted on the perpetrators and policed primarily at/through borders. It is informed by dominant understandings of sex and domestic exploitation that either reject or find difficulty in recognising the SR labour involved as work. The evils are seen as unacceptable practices, often marginally associated with the labour processes which underpin global sex, food and care markets (Stewart 2011). Employers become slave masters, trafficking is understood as a form of criminal exploitation perpetrated by gangs to be stamped out through international and state initiated criminal procedures. Proponents of this approach argue (Bale/Zerk), with some resonance to historical chattel

slavery campaigns, that it offers a clear political message upon which to develop well targeted policies.

A structural vulnerability approach understands MS as a labour process embedded within global markets and therefore within a continuum of labour exploitation or 'unfreedom'. It is imbricated within the business practices that underpin global value chains and networks. From this perspective, the level of labour exploitation in the market can be mitigated or accentuated by the actions of states and international institutional processes. It is based upon a structural understanding of vulnerability. This approach tackles exploitation through work related governance, backed by criminal sanctions where appropriate, directed at the work place. Trafficking is understood as a labour process and as a particular form of labour supply. The innovative provision within MSA Section 54 relating to the obligation of businesses to be transparent in relation to any 'taint' of MS within their own or their suppliers' operations recognises that MS is part of market practices. To what extend does this transparency provision support a structural vulnerability approach? Will this globally oriented business provision contribute to the protection of those providing SR and care services? Or does a labour process analysis and labour rights framework, even with its present conceptual limitations, provide the most appropriate means of mitigating this potential?

Female sex workers' negotiations for socio-economic survival in Dhaka's urban spaces
Dr. Hosna J. Shewly, Research Fellow, Social and Cultural Anthropology, Vrije Universiteit, The Netherlands

This paper is a snapshot of an ongoing ethnographic research on vulnerable young female migrants at Dhaka city. This research looks into the factors behind young female migrants' journey to Dhaka, their desired livelihood, and current income generating activities. To understand the trend, this research is engaged with sex workers at Dhaka. Although illegal in Bangladesh, there is a high demand of sex workers in Dhaka. While the clients and pimps go clean, sex workers become targets of different kinds of laws and social stigma related to their profession. To avoid those, sex workers' engagement with the urban space is inherently mobile. For example, residence based sex workers generally change their venue of work in every week and their home in few months. Worth mentioning here that, a majority of sex workers are young migrants who came to this unknown city for work. Centrality of mobilities in sex workers' livelihood to escape economic hardship and stigma have been uncritically studied in development, migration and commercial sex trade literature. Through unpacking the complexities of sex workers' migration, financial hardship and daily life, this research can bridge development and commercial sex trade/industry literature.

International NGOs, Development and Women in post-independence Bangladesh
Dr Andrew Jones, Assistant Professor, Global Sustainable Development, University of Warwick

Bangladesh is often regarded as a 'land of NGOs'. Tens of thousands of non-governmental organisations work throughout the country to deliver services, empower marginalised communities, and advocate for change. Of these actors, large NGOs which are directly involved in the development sector often take centre stage. Feted by official donors for their flexibility and effectiveness, the Bangladeshi NGO sector is one of the most sophisticated national development networks in the world. Their sheer size and influence also raises difficult questions concerning their accountability, independence, autonomy and effectiveness in a globalising world. This paper introduces and evaluates these questions through a historical lens. It does so by exploring the emergence and expansion of international development NGOs in Bangladesh, from their colonial origins to the contemporary epoch. While the paper will outline a general history of these NGOs, emphasis will be placed on their specific contributions in empowering Bangladeshi women, and how approaches towards this task have evolved over time. The paper will focus upon major international NGOs such as Oxfam and Care International, as well as indigenous Bangladeshi organisations that have risen to prominence such as BRAC and Grameen Bank.

Final Session
2:30-4:00
Session Moderator: Arup Rahee, Poet and General Secretory, Centre for Bangladesh Studies

Poverty, Migration and The Pen: Voices of Bangladeshi Migrants from 'below'
Dr Rifat Mahbub, Assistant Professor, ENH, BRAC University

This paper looks at the examples of Bangladeshi labour migrant writings in different forms and styles. In this three part essay, in the first part, I evaluate the early 'waves' of labour migration from Bangladesh to Britain after the Second World War, and the ways in which alternative methods such as digital archiving are in use to disseminate the early histories of settlement; the second part takes into account examples of oral narratives of Bangladeshi labour migrants from different countries partly to situate the analysis within the neoliberal massification of Bangladeshi labour migration mainly from the post-1990s, and partly to evaluate the role of oral narrative as a literary form to represent the voices of the migrants from 'below'. Finally, in the third part, I will focus on three books of poems, namely *Migrant Tales*, *Me Migrant* and *Injured Me*, to introduce the creative works composed by Bangladeshi migrants whose tales of migration are intertwined with their positional marginalities. In doing so, this paper, for the first time, will comment on the trajectories of Bangladeshi labour migrant literature from the 1960s till now, and the ways in which contemporary labour migrants are carving their own niche within the widening and shifting terrain of migrant literature.

In Conversation with Mukul Hossian, author of *Me Migrant* , and Ayesha Siddiqua, author of *Ahoto Ami* (*Wounded Me*)
Professor Firdous Azim
Recitations from the books
Closing