

Problems of International Placement of Agricultural Workers from Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT: Global population would rise to 9 Billion from present 7.2 Billion by 2050. Accordingly, global agriculture is likely to experience further intensification to feed this increasing population. Many countries in the modern world are facing shortage of skilled and semi-skilled workers to maintain their agriculture. Bangladesh being a thickly populated country, predominantly of agrarian economy, might export its agricultural workers to meet the global demand. However, in doing so, Bangladesh must have adequate institutional arrangements to produce skilled and semi-skilled agricultural workers. Importantly, various impediments for international placement of such workers need also to be addressed on a priority basis. The study revealed that Bangladesh needed to enhance its institutional capacity to produce exportable agricultural workers and adequate government intervention would be required to counterbalance the obstacles. Country-specific requirement for agricultural workers needs to be ascertained by the government and various diplomatic efforts are to be in place to facilitate placement of such workers in different peak seasons.

KEY WORDS: Agricultural Worker, Institutional Capacity, International Placement, Skilled and Semi-skilled workers.

Date of Submission: 02-01-2018

Date of acceptance: 17-01-2019

I. BACKGROUND

Bangladesh is predominantly an agrarian country with rice as the single most important staple food. Due to its very fertile land and favorable weather, different other varieties of crops also grow well abundantly in this country. Here, agriculture sector still remains as one of the most important sector employing more than 45 percent of total labour force (BBS, 2013) as against 61% in 1981 (Hossain, 1984). The present global population of 7.2 billion is expected to become 9.0 billion by the end of 2050. On the other hand, arable land for producing agricultural crops is shrinking every day. Thus in the days to come, the activities in the farm are expected to increase with introduction of new varieties, new technology, new farming system etc to boost production for feeding the ever-increasing global population. With globalization ongoing, the opportunities for migration of skilled/semi-skilled and even unskilled agricultural workers would also increase because of the fact that many developed countries are facing shortage of agricultural workers. Countries like USA, UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Spain, Malaysia, Denmark, Qatar and many others face acute shortage of semi-skilled and skilled agricultural workers primarily in the peak season of harvesting their crops. As such, countries having the capacity to produce surplus agricultural workers might boost their economy by placement of such workers in the global market.

II. OBJECTIVE

The main objective of this study is to see identify the major problems of international placement of agricultural workers from Bangladesh and broadly assess the existing institutional arrangements of producing skilled/semi-skilled agricultural workers within the country.

III. METHODOLOGY

This paper has been prepared after carrying out an in-depth search of secondary materials on various institutional arrangements available in Bangladesh to produce skilled and semi-skilled agricultural workers and related professionals till 2016. In doing so, 15 senior-level experts from the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) and other reputed research organizations were also consulted. Some agricultural professionals, working abroad, were consulted while identifying the major problems of international placement of agricultural workers. Besides, a wide range of literatures available in policy documents, books, journals, organizational reports and research papers etc. have also been consulted.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Problems of International Placement of Agricultural Workers:

Short Job Duration. Most of the jobs for agricultural workers are found to be very temporary in nature. Their nomenclature like “Seasonal Agricultural Worker Scheme” of UK, “Seasonal Worker Programme” of Australia, Temporary Foreign Workers” of South Korea or the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP) of Canada simply reveals that these positions are very temporary in nature. The short duration would cost the potential workers huge incidental expenses in terms of air fare, visa processing etc and would also increase a worker’s period of unemployment between two successive goings. The job duration of selected countries are given in the table below:

Table 1: Duration of Permissible Stay as Agricultural Workers

Name of the Country	Duration in one Go	Remarks
USA	12 Months	Maximum for 36 Months
Canada	3 to 8 Months	-
United Kingdom	12 Months	-
South Korea	36 Months	-
Norway	6 Months	-
Spain	3-6 Months	-

Source: Country-specific policies as available in websites

The jobs are temporary in nature and on contractual basis. After the contract is over the migrant worker is bound to come back in native land. Under this situation, a Bangladesh worker has to really conduct the cost-benefit analysis of travelling both ways for such a short duration. However, the government subsidy and other compensations might make a contract lucrative again.

Lower Level Skill of Agricultural Worker. Most of the countries importing agricultural workers are developed and accordingly their farm operation is also too much mechanized where Bangladeshi workers, in general, do not have much exposure or expertise. Thus we see that only a few activities in the crop value chain like plantation, harvesting of fruits and their sorting etc are suitable for Bangladeshi migrant workers. For example, countries like Malaysia employ Bangladeshi workers for plantation to a great extent. To secure more high paid jobs in these countries, Bangladesh needs to impart country-specific training to its migrant workers.

Need for G to G Agreement. The migration cost of Bangladesh is said to be much higher than that of neighboring countries. Besides, the cost of migration becomes even higher when the issues of fake migration are taken into consideration. The Government of Bangladesh attempted to fix migration cost at a minimum level. To this end government of Bangladesh signed G to G agreement with some countries. The cost of migration to Malaysia has been fixed at Taka 33,176, in Jordan Taka 14,000 and in Korea it is fixed at Taka 65,000 (BER, 2013). However, the export of manpower to Malaysia has been declined due to non-cooperation of the manpower exporting agents, as alleged. However, the G to G agreement would always ensure better job security of the migrant workers as opined by people in the business.

Illiteracy & Ignorance. Most of the migrant workers of Bangladesh are unskilled and illiterate. They are not aware of government migration process, rules and regulations. They are unable to find out trustworthy manpower recruiting agency and do not know the exact migration cost. They even do not know that the migration may be possible through government and about financing form Probashi Kallyan Bank. Due to ignorance of the migrant workers, the ‘Dallas’ (Middlemen) takes the opportunity to exploit them in different phases of the migration. Sometimes the simple and innocent people are caught in the traps of the illegal brokers. In recent years about three lac migrant workers had been illegalized in Malaysia of which 30 thousand were for cheating by argents, dalals, and foreign employers (Nahar-2013).

Fraudulence and Cheating. Despite the prevalence of various well-articulated provisions in the existing immigration regulations, malpractice in the recruitment process is found to be rampant at times. Fraudulent agencies, brokers and other associates in the chain, makes the migration very costly for some. People in some cases are so badly cheated that they lose any further drive to go abroad. Common malpractices in this sector include the imposition of high migration costs and fees on workers, providing wrong information to foreign employers on workers’ skills, giving wrong information about the payment and the nature of overtime including payment mode. Many workers are also deprived of right information about their food and shelter facilities in the destination countries. Due to high costs associated with migration imposed by some recruiting agents, many workers resort to illegal channels to migrate overseas, making workers subject to abuse and violence. In many cases they land illegally in no man’s land or in the deep forest wherefrom they are deported

to Bangladesh. However, the present government has made policies to address all these issues and showing zero tolerance to the offenders.

Undue Competition. Bangladesh would face an undue competition since many other countries enjoy special privileges for entering global agricultural labour market especially in USA, UK, Australia, Canada etc. To offset this problem, Bangladesh has to negotiate with destination countries so that some agreement could be made and similar privileges could be enjoyed.

Inadequate Steps by Foreign Missions. The foreign missions of Bangladesh seem not to be that active to secure the entry of agricultural workers in major markets. The country enjoys various understandings with US but the agricultural workers' market is yet to be tapped. The foreign missions should be aggressive in exploring market and should be able to place seasonal agricultural workers to some of the major destination countries

Inadequate Training Facilities. The training facilities of the country are yet to be organized and made befitting for the global market. In fact, once the market is explored and some understanding with the destination country is reached, the training is to be imparted so that the workers' skill meets the requirement of the destination country and they have some competitive advantage over the potential workers from other countries. In doing so, Bangladesh has to restructure its training facilities befitting to the global requirement. Thus there is requirement of investing fresh capital to enhance the capacity of the training institutes.

B. Major Institutional Arrangements to Produce Skilled and Semi-skilled Agricultural Workers:

Agricultural Education and Research. There are four Agricultural Universities and 37 Agricultural Colleges and several Agricultural Training Institutes (ATI) in the country that offer degrees, diplomas and certificates of education and training in agriculture, animal husbandry, forestry, fisheries, livestock, horticulture and related fields. Experts with Bachelor's, Master's and Ph.D. degrees and technicians with several years' of experience in agricultural development, livestock, fisheries, forestry and horticulture development and research activities are available in the country. In addition skilled, semi skilled and unskilled shepherds with sufficient experience are also available for foreign employment.

Diploma in Agriculture by DAE. The 4-year Diploma Course named "Diploma-in-Agriculture" is run by Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) at 16 (sixteen) different Agriculture Training Institutes (ATI) across Bangladesh. The total capacity of these institutes is 2980 per year. The successful graduates are generally employed as an effective links in the extension network to bridge between the farming community and the research institutes. For admission into these ATIs, one must be a Secondary School Certificate (SSC) or equivalent examination qualified with overall GPA 3.5 and minimum GPA 3.0 in Mathematics. Importantly, the on job personnel can also apply for open school system for the same course.

Diploma and Certificate Courses in Agriculture by BTEB. Bangladesh Technical Education Board (BTEB) has a total of 168 private institutes that offer various diploma degrees and certificate courses on different fields of Agriculture. A rundown of the same that are related to agriculture stream (fisheries, dairy, poultry not included) is given below:

Table 2: Diploma Courses (Agriculture) offered by BTEB

Course	Duration	Qualification	Seat in Public Firm	Seat in Pvt Firms	Total
Diploma in Agriculture	4 Years	SSC or equivalent	2980 (DAE)	10240	13220
Diploma in Forestry	3 Years	SSC or equivalent	50	-	50
Diploma in Forestry in service	2 Years	SSC or equivalent	50	-	50

Source: Annual Report 2013-14, Bangladesh Technical Education Board

Table 3: Certificate Courses (Agriculture) offered by BTEB

Name of the Course	Duration	Qualification
Diploma in Vocational Education (farm machinery)	1 Year	SSC
HSC Vocational Agro Machinery	2 Years	SSC (Voc)
SSC (Voc) Agro-based food	2 Years	
SSC/ Dhakhil (Voc) food processing & preservation	2 Years	Class VIII or JSC or equivalent
SSC (Voc) food processing	2 Years	Class VIII or JSC or equivalent
Dhakhil (Voc) Fruit & Vegetable Cultivation	2 Years	Class VIII or JSC or equivalent

Source: Annual Report 2013-14, Bangladesh Technical Education Board

Agricultural Universities. There are four dedicated Agricultural universities in the country and some other universities have some seats for agricultural study. The collective intake capacity of the dedicated four universities was 1603 in 2009¹, which is 2425 in 2015.

Table 4: Capacities of Agricultural Universities

Name of the University	Capacity in 2009	Capacity in 2015
Bangladesh Agricultural University, Mymensingh	850	1200
Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Agricultural University	130	300
Sher-E-Bangla Agricultural University	423	500
Sylhet Agricultural University	200	425
Total Intake Capacity	1603	2425

Source: All Public Universities Admission Test Notice 2015-16 (www.resultbd.org)

Research System in Agriculture. The National Agricultural Research System (NARS) is composed of Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (BARC) and 12 national agricultural research institutes. BARC is the apex body of the NARS and shoulders the responsibility to strengthen the national agricultural research capability through research planning, coordination, integration and resource allocation. Various dedicated research institutes and their research area are shown below:

Table 5: Agricultural Research Institutes and Research Area

Name of the Institute	Ministry / Estb	Research Area
Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI)	Agriculture / 1976	Research on cereals (except rice), pulses, oilseeds, vege-tables, horticultural crops etc.
Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI)	Agriculture / 1970	Research on Rice
Bangladesh Jute Research Institute (BJRI)	Agriculture / 1951	Research on jute production and utilization
Bangladesh Sugarcane Research Institute (BSRI)	Agriculture / 1994	Research on Sugarcane
Bangladesh Institute of Nuclear Agriculture (BINA)	Agriculture / 1984	Application on nuclear techniques in agriculture
Soil Resources Development Institute (SRDI)	Agriculture / 1983	Soil survey, soil classification and soil characterization
Bangladesh Fisheries Research Institute (BFRI)	Fisheries and Livestock / 1984	Freshwater, brackish water and marine fisheries research
Bangladesh Livestock Research Institute (BLRI)	Fisheries and Livestock / 1984	Research on livestock and poultry
Bangladesh Forest Research Institute (BFRI)	Environment and Forest / 1955	Forestry and agro forestry research
Bangladesh Tea Research Institute (BTRI)	Commerce / 1958	Research on Tea
Bangladesh Sericulture Research & Training Institute (BSRTI)	Textiles and Jute	Sericulture Research
Cotton Development Board	Agriculture	Cotton Research, Training and Seed Multiplication Farm

Source: Professor Abul Kashem, Sylhet Agricultural University, Bangladesh

Horticulture Centers. There are a good number of horticulture centers throughout the country, which directly and indirectly trains a good number of fresh people and neighboring farmers every year. There are a total of 16 Category 'A' centers where a Deputy Director is posted. The number of Category 'B' horticulture centers are 36 where a horticulturist is posted followed by 43 Category 'C' centers which are run by a Nursery Superintendent – A diploma agriculturist on promotion. These centers transfer technology for horticultural crops to farmers/potential farmers/farm workers.²

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

- a. The Government may consider farm laborers (skilled and semi-skilled) as one of the most potential sector to create international employment and thereby to earn foreign currencies.
- b. The foreign missions of Bangladesh may study the global market for agricultural workers and explore the possibility of Bangladeshi workers to fill those gaps.
- c. The government may go into bi-lateral agreements with all friendly countries that are potential for Bangladeshi agricultural workers.
- d. The training capacities of the institutions and other centers may be enhanced so that skilled, semi-skilled agricultural workers can be made ready for international placement after meeting the domestic requirement.

¹ Number of intake capacity in public university, 2009, available at www.banbeis.gov.bd

² Interview with Mr Fakhrul Islam, Deputy Director, Horticulture Center, Jamalpur.

- e. The Ministry of Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment may strengthen its Research and Development to continuously monitor the global labour market with special emphasis to agricultural field and this information may be given instantly to the Ministry of Agriculture and others concerned for subsequent actions.
- f. The government may further simplify the processing formalities for manpower export and start a one stop mall to deliver fast service to the potential migrant workers in agriculture.
- g. The government may consider its Private sector counterpart as the potential body for promoting international placement of agricultural workers.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

There is a considerable demand for skilled and semi-skilled agricultural workers in the global markets especially in the western countries including Europe. However, presently most of these vacancies are not open to Bangladeshi workers. Bangladesh so far could not project its potential as the agriculture worker export country mainly because of its inadequate initiative in this respect. The major prospective countries for agricultural worker export are USA, Canada, UK, Australia, South Africa, New Zealand, Spain, Denmark, Malaysia, Qatar etc. The major problems in exporting agricultural workers are lack of bi-lateral agreement with destination countries, short duration of the contracts, inadequate training facilities at home, mismatch in the demand and supply of skill needed,. Besides, ignorance and illiteracy of workers, undue competition with competitors are noteworthy. Horticultural crop workers have wide opportunity as seasonal workers since many developing countries need huge workers during the peak season of harvesting and processing of horticultural produces.

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Oqila Methqal Sayer Aljonadi Al Shamari" Problems of International Placement of Agricultural Workers from Bangladesh" *International Journal of Business and Management Invention (IJBMI)*, vol. 08, no. 01, 2019, pp 01-05