

Arabic and English language training for the workers taking employment in the international labour market

Labour migration promotion is a major economic strategy of the Government of Bangladesh. Bangladeshi workers see employment overseas as a livelihoods strategy. The government has initiated several activities to regulate labour migration. Some of the achievements have included, passage of a new law called the Overseas Employment and Migrants Act 2013, drafting of a new Overseas Employment Policy that is currently under consideration, review of the institutional systems, research and trainings, and so on. The International Labour Organization (ILO) has been providing technical assistance through the “Promoting Decent Work through Improved Migration Policy and its Application in Bangladesh” project to the government in all these areas and in many other areas too. This project is funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.

ILO is concerned with understanding the ways in which social protection needs of the migrant workers are met once they make a decision to migrate. In the course of work on international labour migration from Bangladesh, the ILO has come across a variety of experiences of migrants in terms of finding employment overseas, costs of recruitment and migration that they have to bear, issues they face while sending remittances, constraints that women workers face, the impact of language proficiency or a lack of it in their integration in the host labour market and their ability to understand the job and employer/supervisor’s instructions. ILO also believes that language skills affect workers’ ability to access to formal and informal mechanisms that may be there for migrant workers’ protection. Language skills also play a major role in workers being able to be part of the local social networks or workers associations that can assist them or help them understand their rights and responsibilities better.

In view of above consideration the ILO executed project has initiated a sub-project titled “Establishing Language Labs at the Technical Training Centres” in partnership with the BRAC Institute of Languages (BRAC-BIL) and the Bureau of Manpower Employment & Training (BMET). This sub-project will develop teaching and learning material for Arabic and English language training to the workers going to the Middle-east and English speaking destination countries. These language labs will not be infrastructure based, rather in view of the target group, would have more interactive and in-person training orientation and use only limited number of equipment such as television, video player and sound player. The training modules will focus on four trades, namely, housekeeping, care-giving, electrical and construction. The module will help set up language course for the outbound workers having no to limited language skills in English and Arabic. The sub-project is being implemented at two of the Technical Training Centres (TTCs) operated by BMET in Dhaka. The TTCs where the language labs are to be set up, are: Bangladesh-Korea TTC and Sheikh Fazilatunnessa Mujib Mohila TTC. At this stage, a needs analysis has been completed and the BRAC-BIL has designed draft outlines of the modules for the four identified trades. On the 19th of January 2014, the BRAC-BIL faculty and the principals and instructors of the two TTCs held a technical session to review the outline of the four modules.

It is planned that the BMET and the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment (MEWOE) would continue the language labs and based on the may consider replication once the ILO executed project comes to an end. At a policy level, the ILO has assisted the MEWOE consider language skills as an important variables in social protection and include it in the proposed Overseas Employment Policy. From the perspective of workers' development, the ILO hopes that continuous focus on this issue and appropriate teaching and learning methodology would improve opportunities for employment for Bangladeshi workers and help in integration into the labour market of the destination country.



Photo 1: BRAC-BIL and TTC staff discussing the outline of the language modules



Photo 2: Women workers with home appliances at the Sheikh Fazilatunnessa Mujib Mohila TTC