lessons learned
by the Work in Freedom Programme

October 2017
INTRODUCTION

Women and girls on the move in South Asia

For millions of poor people in South Asia, migration is an important alternative to the realities of home. People move long distances in pursuit of jobs for varying reasons ranging from economic aspirations or loss of habitat resulting from processes of economic transformation, poverty, climate change, gender based violence or conflict. While some migrate internally, many also migrate abroad. For women and girls, especially of indigenous, Dalit or low-income backgrounds, the experience of further impoverishment and discrimination makes migration a viable option. While many are able to improve their livelihoods in cities at home or abroad, many also face exploitation by employers—practices that amount to forced labour.

What is the Work in Freedom?

Work in Freedom is a development cooperation programme of the ILO supported by the Department for International Development (DFID), United Kingdom that started in 2013. It adopts an integrated and targeted approach in developing practices and multi-sectorial policy measures that reduce vulnerability to trafficking of women and girls in South Asian countries of origin (Bangladesh, India and Nepal) and in selected destination countries (India, Jordan and Lebanon).

To address these challenges, the Work in Freedom programme has set up a series of interventions engaging migrants, civil groups, businesses and regulators in a collaborative effort to begin addressing the multiple facets of forced labour in source and destination areas of migrant domestic and garment workers. Interventions include: 1) Law and policy initiatives; 2) Assessments and piloting of recruitment practices; 3) Worker empowerment interventions; 4) Employer advocacy; 5) Community work in countries of origin; and 6) Research.

Notes on interpreting the lessons

Throughout the implementation of the programme, the ILO and its partners have learned several lessons in different areas of its work. The most significant ones are explained herein. Each one of these lessons is connected to a specific intervention that was designed as a part of an overall framework of interventions. Therefore none of these lessons should be read in isolation from one another.
• Reached 370,000 women with support services in local communities (such as providing training to help women decide whether to migrate for work or accessing basic services);
• Reached 70,000 workers in destination areas (for example through worker centres, mobile phone services or trade union support);
• Helped 109,000 women join a trade union or worker collective so that they can receive better support and protection in their destination;
• Engaged with over 530 labour recruiters to identify and pilot better recruitment practices;
• Worked with governments and provided technical guidance to improve multiple laws and policies (including on fair recruitment, domestic work and trafficking); and
• Published over 10 studies and research papers providing new evidence to policy makers.

Main publications of the Work in Freedom Programme

2. For a fee, the business of recruiting Bangladeshi women for domestic work in Jordan and Lebanon. ILO, Geneva, 2015.

Regional Policy briefs of the Work in Freedom Programme

1. Policy brief on Anti Trafficking Laws, Policies and Administrative Practices
2. Women’s Mobility and Domestic Work
3. Policy Brief on Practices and Regulations of Recruitment to Domestic Work
4. Policy Brief on Practices and Regulations of Recruitment to Garment Work
Laws and policies
Laws, polices and administrative practices to prevent human trafficking tend to prioritize educating migrants and holding recruiters accountable while glossing over working and living conditions. Policy guidance on improving working conditions is more important than educating workers about risks they often can’t mitigate or holding labour recruiters accountable for practices that do not necessarily depend on them. It is important to prioritize labour and working conditions in destinations rather than over-emphasizing prevention through pre-employment interventions. For more information see ILO Policy Brief on Anti-Trafficking Laws, Policies and Administrative Practices.

**Context of how the lesson was learned:** The programme reviewed anti-trafficking laws, policies and administrative practices in countries within its purview and provided technical inputs when solicited by constituents. During the design or review of anti-trafficking policies or processes, it was witnessed that some actors tend to be fully involved in policy design and implementation such as law enforcement authorities, women and social affairs departments and NGOs specialized in anti-trafficking. However, the main stakeholders able to identify and address vulnerable labour relations such as migrant worker collectives, trade unions, employers’ associations, labour recruitment associations, and relevant government departments are often excluded or not meaningfully involved. Employers and labour officials tend to be reluctant to engage in processes that tacitly acknowledge prevalence of human trafficking and forced labour. They are also wary that such processes lead to actions that challenge influential players, disrupt existing labour relations triggering a political cost for themselves. As for migrant worker collectives, they are often not recognized nor invited to such policy spaces. As a result of the political economy of labour at destination, anti-trafficking policies tend to focus around pre-employment interventions such as providing information and training to workers, rather than improving working conditions.

**Implications of lesson for future programming:** It should not be taken for granted that the existence of an anti-trafficking law or policy constitutes a comprehensive way for Governments to prevent human trafficking. Some States may have anti-trafficking laws and yet they have sponsorship systems that increase migrant worker’s vulnerability to human trafficking. Others may have institutionalized poverty wages for migrant workers that undermine their capacity to make a living. The existence of anti-trafficking laws, policies and administrative practices is not a reliable indicator that countries are taking meaningful action in addressing human trafficking.
Migration bans increase vulnerability to human trafficking.

A number of countries across Asia have instituted various forms of bans that, for example, prevent young women migrating overseas for domestic work in order to protect them. However, when both demand for migrant workers and supply of workers are high, employers and workers will find ways of circumventing such bans at a greater cost for all and increasing vulnerability to trafficking of migrant workers. Reversing poor migration control policies such as migration bans also requires sustained advocacy even after bans are reversed, or the bans can be reintroduced and will undermine previous advocacy efforts. Strong and focused mobilization of women, migrant and worker rights advocacy groups should be sustained. Migration bans are always discriminatory on various grounds such as gender, age, occupation, family status or nationality. For more information particularly about migration bans and domestic work see ILO Policy Brief on Women’s Mobility and Domestic Work.

Context of how lesson was learned: Countries of origin and destination under the purview of the programme have enacted different forms of migration bans particularly focused on women’s migration for work. These bans take several forms such as policies, administrative decisions and even vigilance processes that seek to prevent women from travelling abroad for jobs. The main motivation of these bans is to prevent women from being abused. Several anti-trafficking programmes have actively promoted such interventions. The ILO undertook a study to see how effective these bans were and found that they were not only ineffective, but also further increase women’s vulnerability to trafficking as women were forced to take more circuitous and hazardous routes to find a job. This worked against the goals of the programme. For more information see ILO’s No Easy Exit: Migration Bans Affecting Women from Nepal. While the programme was successful in supporting at least partial repeals of such bans, they also tend to be reinstated as a result of political vicissitudes and upsurge of patriarchal view-points.

Implications of lesson for future programming: Anti-trafficking programming and policy makers should not seek to stop or prevent migration. Such measures usually include exit clearances or permits, border or railway vigilance committees, or policies restricting legal and feasible options to migrate. Moreover advocacy to repeal such bans should be sustained overtime, otherwise bans may be reinstated.
Garment factories may create worker committees to address worker issues, yet their independence to represent and voice concerns is often compromised. To address increasing migrant worker inflows, trade unions create migrant worker committees to represent migrant worker issues yet migrant workers’ representation and voice tends to be subsumed by host worker concerns. Likewise governments create bodies to address migrant issues without involving them in the design, implementation or monitoring of their work. Constituents often establish migrant committees to find solutions to emerging migrant worker challenges. However migrant worker’s presence or representation in these committees is often absent or symbolic. Principles of freedom of association and collective bargaining should be adhered to by all constituents to address migrant right issues. In fact addressing migrant worker’s rights is more likely to be effective outside the spaces that exclude or put migrant workers in unduly unrepresented, asymmetrical and disadvantageous bargaining positions. Such committees generate expectations that are not met and can be deceptive.

**Context of how lesson was learned:** The programme came across constituents in several countries who requested support to create migrant worker committees within enterprises, government institutions or trade unions. However migrant workers were excluded from representation and decision making responsibilities in these committees, reducing their role, if any, to token involvement. In most of these cases these committees ultimately reinforced power asymmetries between workers and employers, achieving the opposite result than the one that was officially proclaimed.

**Implications of lesson for future programming:** Review assumptions that migrant worker committees in enterprises, inter-departmental government committees on migrant workers and trade union committees on migrant workers are a good practice to prevent migrant worker abuses, unless migrant workers are dully represented in accordance with fundamental principles of freedom of association and collective bargaining.
Recognizing how different forms of discrimination are perpetrated against migrant women workers, is critical for better anti-trafficking interventions.

In general policy discourse, discrimination is often referred to in euphemisms that undermine the possibility of understanding how it happens. However, it is varying forms of discrimination that explain why women and girls chose to migrate and the treatment they face during the different stages of the migration cycle. Discrimination is often based on gender, caste, class, age, occupation, language, race, religion and/or other factors. Varying combinations of discrimination generate visible and invisible barriers that compound women and girls’ difficulty in accessing public entitlements, training opportunities, jobs and fair and equal compensation and treatment throughout the migration cycle. Recognizing how these forms of discrimination are manifested and interact is critical for more successful interventions.

Context of how lesson was learned: The programme has partnered with NGOs and trade unions to provide referral services for prospective migrants and actual migrant workers. These service vary depending on the local context – they may consist of access to health, education, civil services, employment, agriculture, legal support, language learning and other. In spite of referrals, many prospective migrants are often unable to access entitlements unless they are accompanied by social workers who can assist them to overcome discriminatory behaviors of duty bearers. This becomes all the more difficult when discrimination is trivialized and legitimized in public political discourses. In such cases, it is hardly possible for a young woman from a minority group to access her entitlements without the backing of civil groups. A systemic form of discrimination is also manifested in labour compensation practices. Discrimination in wages against migrant women as compared with host community workers, is common. Several studies commissioned by the programme point to the prevalence of women from Adivasi, Dalit or minority backgrounds in the lower rungs of supply chains where discriminatory abuses are more frequent.

Implications of lesson for future programming: Programming should include measures that deliberately tackle exclusion and facilitate access to rights and entitlements for populations who are subject to multiple forms of discrimination. Working and evaluating with organizations managed by and for those who are discriminated against is more likely to yield results. Leveraging international instruments such as ILO Convention 111, or the UN Convention to eliminate all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is helpful.
Law enforcement and labour inspection should be responsive to migrant workers’ rights.

The political economy of law-enforcement makes it difficult to enforce labour or anti-trafficking laws against abusive employers or recruiters of domestic and garment workers. The disparity of power and resources between women migrants and forced labour offenders compounded with structural incentives of law enforcement agencies to meet performance targets (ex. addressing irregular migration) means that litigation is likely to result in migrants themselves being incriminated under other alleged offences such as theft of property, trespassing, illegal migrant status, document fraud, prostitution, etc. This is further aggravated by behavioral stereotypes among law enforcement personnel related to power, gender, race and social status. Addressing these challenges requires genuine commitment of authorities to be responsive to women and migrant workers’ rights and mechanisms for accountability and enforcement. Labour inspection departments are more likely to be responsive, however they are often under-funded, understaffed, poorly trained and face administrative and procedural obstacles in undertaking inspections.

Context of how lesson was learned: Partners involved in the programme in several countries have come across multiple cases where migrant women workers who filed complaints, where accused themselves of some abuse, as a result of which they were detained and or deported and unable to seek justice. Even other migrant workers who extended support to such workers were criminalized in one way or another. It is important that law enforcement, labour inspection and anti-trafficking departments protect migrant workers during disputes so that they can conduct full and meaningful inspections and enable access to justice.

Implications of lesson for future programming: Without effective organizational and administrative provisions that counter-weigh asymmetrical power relations between employers and migrant workers, it is naïve to expect that law enforcement institutions deliver justice for migrant workers. Strengthening the capacity of workers to uphold their rights and ensuring that administrative measures allow them to seek justice, is important.
Improving laws, policies and practices requires more than technical assistance for reviewing.

Policies that would protect the rights of migrant workers may seem obvious for international and other partner organizations; however, identity politics may reduce the space for policymakers to uphold the rights of migrant workers. Strong advocacy is needed to ensure that the focus is on the rights of migrant workers rather than the agenda of stakeholders who blame migrants for their woes. How a policy shapes often depends on factors that are beyond the scope of international organizations. That is why international organizations should take precautionary measures to ensure that policy review processes are consistent with the organization’s recommendations (e.g. consultation with constituents). The programme has had to tread a fine line between engaging and providing principled policy inputs without legitimizing how stakeholders actually enact and implement those policies.

Context of how lesson was learned:
The programme has reviewed anti-trafficking policies, recruitment policies and bilateral agreements that appeared to protect the rights of migrant workers, however subsequent drafts of such policies ended up diluting even existing protections for workers. The involvement of the programme opened the door to the risk of legitimizing the dilution of rights, rather than ensuring an improvement.

Implications of lesson for future programming: Prior to deciding to review a draft policy, it is important for organizations or programmes to assess the actual leverage of their technical inputs in the broader political context in order to judge whether the act of reviewing a policy may be instrumentalized for a different political purpose that undermines the very intent of the review.
Recruitment Interventions
Training on fair recruitment and ethical principles is premature in context where informality of recruitment dominates.

Where informality of recruitment dominates, formal and identifiable labour recruiters only play a partial role in recruitment processes. Training them on fair recruitment principles usually assumes that they are the main recruitment players, when in fact most recruitment happens outside their purview. In fact they often depend on a variety of other informal and formal intermediaries as well as employers and regulators. Rather than training formal identifiable labour recruiters on codes of conduct which they will not be able to implement, it is important to (a) first understand the entire recruitment process from end to end, (b) identify options to reduce vulnerabilities of migrant workers in the jobs they seek and the recruitment pathways, and (c) support practices that address those vulnerabilities including recruitment alternatives to occupations where work outcomes are more likely to be decent. See examples of recruitment to domestic work and to garment work.

Context of how lesson was learned: In recent years standard-setting around “fair recruitment” or “ethical recruitment” has become common among international organizations and migrant rights organizations, multi-national corporations and large recruitment and employment agencies (e.g. ILO’s General principles and operational guidelines for fair recruitment; the World Employment Confederation’s Code of Conduct for Recruiting Agencies; Verite’s Fair Hiring Toolkit; International Human Rights and Business’ Dhaka Principles for Migration with Dignity). The programme implemented training programmes for identifiable labour recruiters. During interactions with labour recruiters, the programme team realized that in sectors where employers prefer anonymity, a low profile and limited accountability, formal recruitment players only play a minor role. In fact recruitment processes in those cases tend to involve multiple stakeholders responding to very different multi-jurisdictional incentives and market trends. Rather than offering training to formal identifiable recruitment agencies, the programme therefore decided to prioritize assessments of recruitment practices and regulation across recruitment pathways in order to be able to recommend better practices and better regulation.

Implications of lesson for future programming: While training is important in contexts of formal recruitment, it is important to assess recruitment processes and develop tailored practices that reduce vulnerabilities for workers in the context of specific recruitment and work pathways. These policies briefs on recruitment practices to garment work and to domestic work show possible options.
Promoting recruitment can be counter-productive in some contexts, and can even amount to institutionalizing human trafficking if prevailing working conditions are notoriously poor.

In sectors such as domestic and garment work where working and living conditions tend to be poor, recruitment outcomes are messy. Promotion of recruitment and poor regulation of recruitment runs the risk of institutionalizing recruitment into poor working conditions. It is very important that international organizations do not promote recruitment without first taking into account working conditions. Guidance on recruitment regulation should enable multiple practices of recruitment to take place as recommended by these policy briefs on practices and regulations of recruitment to garment work and to domestic work.

Context of how lesson was learned: The programme had designed interventions to improve recruitment processes to domestic and garment work. However, interaction with migrant workers and multiple studies about working conditions in both these sectors pointed to systemic challenges, making the prospects of recruitment to these sectors, however well intended, problematic. It became clear that programme interventions should first ensure that jobs to which workers are recruited to are decent, and only then support accountable recruitment practices that are likely to be emancipatory. This may include interventions that seek to reduce vulnerabilities in existing recruitment and employment processes as well as interventions that seek to develop alternative recruitment processes to jobs that are likely to be more decent.

Implications of lesson for future programming: Anti-trafficking and safe migration programmes should be cautious not to promote recruitment into working and living conditions that are notoriously poor. This tends to happen as a result of poor programme design in which migration and recruitment are identified as general focuses of interventions without taking into account the specificity of working condition into which migrant workers are hired. It is therefore important to specifically assess working conditions in targeted occupational sectors.
A holistic and nuanced approach to regulation of the recruitment industry is important.

Registered recruitment agencies in countries of origin often claim that they are transparent about recruitment offers for workers, while the employer in the country of destination offers different working conditions to the worker once s/he has arrived. Moreover sub-agent that the registered recruitment agency contract to find interested workers, often paint yet a different picture of the work abroad to the aspiring worker. If working conditions are poor, each stakeholder in the recruitment process has a vested interest not to volunteer information that could make the migrant worker change her/his mind. The more there are intermediaries involved in the recruitment process, the more likely it is that omission of information (often building on worker’s tacit assumptions) if not misinformation about working conditions will happen – leading a worker who experienced the recruitment process to affirm that she was deceived. Yet each stakeholder is often able to claim plausible deniability. Moreover a good staffing business or recruitment practice doesn’t mean other businesses will not exploit what they perceive as a niche opportunity resulting from the good business’ focus on ethical recruitment only – market incentives means that they will.

Context of how lesson was learned:
The programme undertook several studies and assessments of recruitment practices (ILO, 2015), (ILO, 2016) and interacted with multiple labour recruiters and employers in training events and consultations. It became clear that multiple stakeholders have different types of roles and perceptions of their roles in recruitment processes. Interventions targeting only one type of labour recruiter – usually identifiable formal registered recruitment agencies, were superficial and insufficient in addressing the full nature of recruitment related abuses across the recruitment pathway. Likewise interventions that attribute responsibility to only one type of stakeholder (e.g. the informal sub-agent) veil the systemic nature abusive misinformation. This is common in programmes with a criminal justice focus which tend to shift responsibility for abuse to the weakest intermediary, while the system that enables misinformation and deception remains unaddressed (e.g. prosecution initiatives in many anti trafficking programmes).

Implications of lesson for future programming: If recruitment is not tackled holistically taking into account differing labour market incentives at every step of a migrant’s recruitment pathway including her working conditions, programmes that only target one type of labour recruiter in one location, can generate incentives for omission of information, misinformation and deception to be further out-sourced and accountability even harder to pinpoint. Likewise anti-trafficking prosecution and other criminal justice approaches in such contexts tend not to address the structural nature of abuse, yet they can generate a misleading perception of justice and improvement. Understanding and addressing the structural nature of recruitment and work challenges is important.
Workers’ involvement in monitoring recruitment processes is usually missing in the design and monitoring of recruitment processes and regulatory frameworks. Special measures are necessary to ensure that recruitment practices are not only accountable to employers, labour recruiters and regulators, but also importantly to workers. In order to address this lack of worker representation, special measures are necessary that meaningfully involve worker representatives in the design and monitoring of recruitment processes.

**Context of how lesson was learned:**
The programme undertook several assessments of recruitment practices and interacted with multiple labour recruiters, employers and workers. It became clear that worker organizations are rarely consulted in the design of recruitment policies. In fact in some cases bilateral memoranda of understanding on recruitment of migrant workers between countries of destination and origin – are deliberately confidential and inaccessible for workers.

**Implications of lesson for future programming:** Interventions on recruitment should meaningfully involve migrant worker representatives in monitoring of recruitment practices throughout all ends of the recruitment process from the sub-agent to the employer.
Worker Empowerment
Successful outreach to migrant workers requires meaningfully involving them in the design, implementation and evaluation of interventions.

All successful services for migrant workers developed by the programme such as pre-decision sessions, post-arrival cultural adaptation, language learning and legal counselling, required close affinity, proximity, dialogue and involvement of migrant workers in the very design, delivery and evaluation of these services. Findings indicate that social networks, including family, caste, friends and other migrants are strong influences in migration decisions and planning.

Context of how lesson was learned:
Initially the programme especially in countries of origin implemented awareness raising interventions that were supply driven and meant to educate aspiring migrant workers about the realities of work abroad. Community workers quickly realized that messages needed to be tailored to aspiring migrant worker needs if they were to be absorbed. In other words learning and communication had to be mutual both for workers and community workers.

Implications of lesson for future programming: Outreach and awareness raising for prospective women migrants and/or workers should involve them in the design, implementation and evaluation of outreach activities. Trade unions working with women in both areas of origin and destination are more effective in encouraging workers or prospective migrants to raise their own concerns and interests and develop responses that would reflect those concerns. Successful outreach to migrant workers depend on effective use of these existing networks to design, deliver and evaluate these services. The intervention should be cognizant of social networks and include mechanisms for adaptive development. The involvement of migrant workers and families need to be sustainable and, therefore, should be conceived from a participatory perspective.
To address the interconnected challenges of patriarchy, mobility and work, communication, readiness to learn and cooperation between multiple networks of civil advocacy groups including worker trade unions, migrant rights organizations, women rights organizations and other relevant rights-based groups is necessary so that they all converge in a common policy advocacy discourse tailored to multiple geographical contexts.

**Context of how lesson was learned:** The programme witnessed that there are women’s rights organizations that focus on reducing violence but do not uphold women’s right to mobility or advocate for their labour rights. There are anti-trafficking organizations that focus on incriminating labour recruiters or educating migrants, but gloss over systemic violations of women’s rights at work. There are trade unions that work on labour issues but are unable to give space to women’s voice and representation within their organizations. Advocacy and empowerment is more effective when all networks are cognizant of their limitations, seeks to address them and reach out to each other to support one another in addressing the multiple root causes of vulnerability to forced labour.

**Implications of lesson for future programming:** Programmes that seek to empower migrant women workers should build on the complementary capacity of specialized organizations that are able to address patriarchy, mobility and labour rights and cooperate on common agendas.

*Alone, neither the NGOs, the trade unions nor the women’s rights groups can expect to be successful in empowering migrant women workers.*
While understanding one’s rights is of course a precondition to successful negotiation, overemphasizing knowledge of rights without imparting capacity to negotiate in the migration process or for better working conditions can mislead migrants into risky confrontations where they are abused.

**Context of how lesson was learned:**
The programme is centered on a rights-based approach. Much of the pre-departure awareness raising that the programme supports focused on imparting beneficiaries the knowledge of their rights: rights as citizens, rights as women, rights as migrants and rights as workers. In reality many of these rights are not respected for reasons that are seldom openly discussed since such discussions directly challenge different power structures in families, societies and institutions. Yet understanding these challenges is important in order to impart a capacity to communicate and advocate for the respect of one’s rights.

The programme came across some cases of both domestic and garment workers who referred to their rights, yet were deported as a result of doing so. Knowing one’s rights is insufficient. It is important for migrant workers to understand the challenges involved in demanding ones rights and knowing how to effectively advocate for their respect. As a result of this realization, the programme is also focusing attention to successful communication and negotiation techniques that enable workers to gain the respect of their employers to preserve their worker rights.

**Implications of lesson for future programming:** Rights based approaches are important in programming, however in addition to that, soft skills enabling workers to translate those rights into their working reality are also important. This lesson should not be read in isolation from the next and other lessons.
Without freedom of association and collective bargaining for migrant workers, reducing their vulnerability to forced labour is unsustainable over the long run. Fostering both fundamental principles often runs counter to current policy environments and requires readiness of international organizations to be creative and assume political risks.

So far, organizing migrant workers has been more effective where regulatory and physical space enabled workers to connect, support each other, defend their collective rights and network with wider social movements in order to uphold their rights. In the absence of regulatory space, ad-hoc measures creating physical space (e.g. worker centers) or regulatory space (e.g. measures enabling freedom of association) are necessary albeit subject and vulnerable to strong counter-pressures and political vicissitudes. Collective bargaining rights for migrant workers are often denied and seen as a threat to competitiveness rather than a boon to productivity. Upholding these two fundamental principles is difficult, yet possible through creative initiatives such as working with different civil society organizations, establishing worker centers of, by and for workers and enabling migrants to create their own unions depending on the legal, social and labour context.

Context of how lesson was learned: Where migrants were able to join and form their own worker trade unions, organizing for justice in relation to common grievances and collective bargaining has been possible. In places where migrants were barred from freedom of association and collective bargaining, support for organizing and provisions of services by and among migrant workers has been more challenging. Some constituents have even taken retaliatory measures against workers. In these contexts working with civil society organizations or establishing physical space for worker to gather and services through mobile phones have allowed breaking workers’ isolation and creating a stronger basis for expressions of solidarity.

Implications of lesson for future programming: Freedom of association and collective bargaining are central to effective strategies to reduce vulnerability to forced labour. Advocating for such fundamental principles is important and requires political courage and creativity.
In contexts of highly restrictive mobility regulations applying to migrant workers, a workers’ centre can become a target for police and prosecutors to arrest workers and undermine the very functions of workers’ centres.

Special measures are necessary to ensure that law enforcement personnel respect freedom of association of migrant workers.

**Context of how lesson was learned:**
A migrant centre had to change locations as a result of the presence of a police station nearby.

**Implications for future programming:** Prior to establishing a worker centre, a thorough assessment of the opportunities and risks for migrant workers to use the centre should be conducted.
Employer Advocacy
Advocacy to change behaviors of employers should be particularly sensitive to the social, economic and political context, otherwise it can backfire.

Simple advocacy messages, however correct they are, such as demanding that employers of domestic workers respect the labour rights of migrant domestic workers, can backfire by polarizing and strengthening majoritarian views against migrants. While employers should be confronted on poor practices, media campaigns alone cannot replace effective labour law enforcement and the way media campaigns are undertaken should ultimately seek to build employers empathy and support. Messages that are perceived, incorrectly, as derisory of poor employers can antagonize rather than build support. Messages which on the other hand portray common interests of employers and workers are more likely to be accepted. Ultimately though, even the best of media campaigns will be insufficient if labour law enforcement is weak.

**Context of how lesson was learned:**
The programme supported information campaigns for employers of domestic workers. Rather than develop simple messages highlighting poor practices of employers, the programme commissioned a comprehensive study on the attitudes of employers and tailored messages that responded to specific findings. Video spots were developed that focused on common interests such as nurturing trust among employers and workers. In spite of this some constituents have reacted vehemently against migrant worker advocacy especially in relation to domestic workers highlighting other more important concerns such as their own economic plight in light of economic stagnation and refugee crises. Moreover a general environment of poor labour law enforcement against abusive employers generates a sense of impunity that undermines the messages behind media campaigns.

**Implications of lesson for future programming:**
Advocacy on the rights of migrant workers should seek to build empathy and support for common causes of both migrant workers and others host workers. Caution is important in contexts where criticism of migrant workers can trigger majoritarian counter reactions that ultimately further undermine migrants’ rights. Media campaigns for employers should be undertaken hand in hand with effective policy and administrative measures to improve labour law enforcement against abusive employers.
Community Work
Prospective migrants are usually those who cannot access basic services in their communities. Intensive two-way communication is necessary where populations who are usually excluded or unable to access basic services in their communities (e.g. women, Dalits, Adivasis, or other minorities) explain the local circumstances of why they are unable to access these services and participate in strategizing effective local solutions to overcome such barriers. For example community-based organizations can consult marginalized groups in order to make it possible for Dalit and Adivasi women to access local employment options, social protection, health and education services, agriculture extension services, foreign employment options, and local political representation, etc. When this happens, migration is often no longer necessary as local livelihood options become possible.

**Context of how lesson was learned:** Most safe migration programmes focus on providing potential migrants with information to migrate safely. Initially many project partners within the programme did likewise. However as awareness about the reasons why women migrate became clearer, it also became apparent that women may not have to migrate if they accessed certain types of information, services and jobs from which they tend to be excluded. The programme therefore not only seeks to provide information to potential migrants about migration and work abroad, it also focuses on ensuring that potential migrants are aware about other options that may result in the person not having to migrate.

**Implications of lesson for future programming:** Safe migration programmes should consider re-framing their focus to enable mobility by choice hence enabling options for people to secure their livelihoods by staying or migrating.

In better information campaigns, the content of information exchanged with prospective migrants should not exclusively focus on safe migration.
While quantitative targets are expected by government authorities, they incentivized a supply-driven bias in interventions. Community workers pay more attention to complying with delivery targets, with schedules and deadlines to deliver sessions in multiple villages rather than listening, understanding, and responding to populations’ needs and adjusting their work accordingly.

**Context of how lesson was learned:**
At the beginning of the programme, high quantitative targets were set for the numbers of potential migrant workers that interventions would reach in areas of origin. As a result of these high targets, partner organizations would ensure that their social and community workers cover a wide range of villages in delivering specific messages without necessarily taking the time to listen, understand and respond to the concerns of populations that were likely to migrate. This affected the effectiveness of interventions as messages were often seen to be in dissonance with community needs. For example, in some villages people were migrating because of irrigation problems, yet community outreach kept focusing on encouraging migration while irrigation issues could be solved. The programme therefore subsequently reduced targets in order to ensure that community workers spend sufficient time understanding their areas of work in more depth and tailor their work to the context of each village. As community workers spent more time understanding the context of villages where they worked, it became clearer that their roles were not only about providing information on migration, but that they had to become catalysts of information about themes affecting the lives and mobility of women.

**Implications of lesson for future programming:** Programmes seeking to inform inhabitants about their rights when they migrate would be better advised to ensure that their respective community workers invest time in understanding the reasons why people migrate and tailor their interventions accordingly rather than seeking to upscale mass awareness campaigns that will not be effective.
While safe migration programmes can be helpful, in patriarchal contexts the concepts of safety and protection tend to exclude women’s agency. Protection measures for women tend to be designed without the leadership and participation of migrating women and their representatives. This inevitably leads to policies and practices that disempower them from exercising their rights (e.g. restrictions on mobility) rather than empowering them.

**Context of how lesson was learned:**
The programme initially interacted with constituents that claimed to have had experience in safe migration and anti-trafficking information campaigns. However the strategies that were proposed sought to restrict women’s mobility through different means rather than address the reasons why women migrated and support the migration when it was a choice.

**Implications of lesson for future programming:** Anti-trafficking and migration programmes should review the framework of safe migration as an appropriate lens to address women workers’ vulnerabilities. Instead programmes should consider frameworks that enable women’s emancipation such as programme supporting informed mobility by choice – not simply by referring to other options, but removing structural obstacles that impede choices.
Interventions to promote safe migration are ineffective and unsustainable as long as causes of distress migration are not addressed.

Markets favour taking advantage of distress migrants to access cheaper labour rather than hiring local more expensive labour. It is therefore important to develop interventions that on the one hand reduce distress migration to make migration a real choice and on the other hand promote incentives that equalize the value of foreign and host labour.

Context of how lesson was learned: In many communities where the programme supported outreach work, multiple and varying distress factors were prompting women to migrate. Providing information about accessing entitlements of any sort was simply insufficient as it was clear that agrarian and environmental distress would persist. Referring women to occupations where working conditions are notoriously poor also poses a moral dilemma. Information campaigns for communities to access their rights cannot replace responsible development policies.

Implications of lesson for future programming: Migration information campaigns should not be used in areas where distress migration is happening as a way of replacing peace building and responsible development policies and programmes.
Women’s mobility, even when it is prompted by distress factors, depends on views about women’s role in the family, village, muballa or bastee. Where criteria of honour prevail, distress can be hidden, quietly suffered, silenced or even denied. Elsewhere it could be admitted and even openly highlighted in which case a woman’s migration becomes socially acceptable. While it is important to grasp the nature of distress and how it affects mobility, generalizations can also be misleading. Depending on the context, the discourse on distress factors and migration as a choice can be misperceived as demeaning and socially unacceptable, while it can also serve to legitimize and encourage migration regardless of what may lie ahead. It is therefore important that interventions are cognizant of prevailing views about women particularly in relation to distress.

**Context of how lesson was learned:** Community interventions were initially geared towards, but not exclusively focused on safe migration. As community partners became increasingly aware that information about local jobs and entitlements could be just as important for those who considered migrating, partners shifted more attention towards the role women in society and how it affects or not mobility in contexts of distress. Evaluators also highlighted how the acknowledgement of ‘distress’ is socially mediated, in other words, it is appraised in a specific social context. In areas where female migration was low, criteria of honour prevailed, whereas in areas with high migration women’s labour mobility was socially more acceptable.

**Implications of lesson for future programming:** Pre-decision training is important, however trainers should be mindful of specific contexts of patriarchy and how it affects women’s mobility.
While vocational and life skill training through private and national skills training institutions can reach higher quantities of people, the way the training is conducted and its content can mislead migrants and aggravate the risk of trafficking, in spite of technical assistance. These institutions tend to prioritize foreign employment over other considerations. Realistic discussions on the real working and living conditions of workers or involvement of workers organizations is limited and would undermine the very incentives under which they operate. Disengaging from providing technical advice would also be irresponsible as constituents demand it. A do no harm approach should be followed where training is shortened and staggered between pre departure and post arrival stages and where women worker organizations are involved.

**Context of how lesson was learned:**
At the request of government constituents, the programme collaborated in reviewing pre-departure curricula for migrant workers. As the programme reviewed pre-departure skilling processes it was realized that the content of the training tended to omit information on working conditions abroad and portray a rosy picture about possible earnings. Skilling institutions needed to justify their funding with targets of people they trained and employed. Recruitment agencies would often omit information about working conditions abroad. As a result the programme suggested to involve migrant worker organizations in training programmes to try to ensure that a more realistic picture of working conditions abroad would be provided.

**Implications of lesson for future programming:** Consider different ways to involve migrant worker organizations in skilling processes as they are more likely to provide information that can be useful for workers.
While outreach and awareness-raising directly with communities can be helpful, they need to be carefully implemented so as not to: Actively promote or discourage migration; give migrant women the sense that now they have been trained they will be safe; not ignore conflict and political reasons why people migrate; not increase risks to women in their homes and communities (e.g. risks of domestic violence if safe migration training is seen to encourage women to migrate or if women return and are viewed to have engaged in ‘immoral’ activities while away). See forthcoming ILO’s Working with women in migration: A handbook for practitioners.

Context on how lesson was learned: As the programme undertook community outreach interventions, it was realized that the reasons for which people migrate differed, and were often related to domestic violence, caste discrimination, debt, land and water disputes, conflict and insecurity and other types of tensions. Generalized messages could be seen as discriminatingly favoring one party as opposed to another and undermine the very purpose of conveying information.

Implications of lesson for future programming: A do no harm approach in developing messages on migration is an important precaution to avoid exacerbating tension and conflict. A strong monitoring system is also important to detect unintended outcomes, inform adaptation of processes and measure progress in achieving outcomes.
Research
Addressing inaction and status quo on advancing application of international labour standards is better through partnership strategies whereby proactive advocacy is undertaken by non-government players, and technical evidence-based advocacy by international organizations.

**Context of how lesson was learned:** The programme has presented research to government officials pointing to better policies in relation to mobility bans against workers, recruitment and anti-trafficking policies. However, in spite of evidence, officials did not take any action. For example, the programme witnessed the influence of recruitment agencies on regulators. In order to overcome inaction, the programme had to support civil society actors in order for them to pressure relevant government authorities to change targeted policies.

**Implications of lesson for future programming:** Reports and evidence on forced labour are insufficient as long as civil groups are not able to advocate and keep the pressure for advocated policy changes.
Programme
Design
Contexts of trafficking vary widely not only in geography, but in relation to poverty, gender, disaster, conflict, and type of work migrant chose, thus requiring different strategies of intervention. A one-size-fits-all approach will not work. Migration in a globalized context is highly complex. In source communities migration forks out into different directions and in destination areas migration converges from different origins. The multiplicity of variables including migrant profiles, recruitment practices, laws and policies across countries and regions are numerous and complex. There should be no expectation that targeting specific individuals across migration corridors will prevent human trafficking from occurring. Interventions focusing on systemic policy changes are more difficult yet likely to yield better results in reducing vulnerability to forced labour.

Context of how lesson was learned:
The programme reviewed the assumptions of its initial theory of change. It became clear that several interventions could contribute to a reduction of vulnerability to forced labour but wouldn’t be directly attributable to such an outcome as multiple factors interplay at varying locations.

Implications of lesson for future programming: Interventions should be tailored to different contexts. A one-size-fits-all approaches tend to generalize conclusions that work in certain contexts and fail in others.
Communication
Communicators tend to simplify messages to make them more accessible for public audiences. While this is important, public awareness on human trafficking and forced labour is significantly influenced by common myths that require careful deconstruction.

Context of how lesson was learned:
For example, as part of an agenda to promote the work of the programme, several case stories were reviewed to showcase examples of good work which was misunderstood as consisting in promoting safe migration. However as explained above, promoting safe migration does not prevent the violation of women’s rights. In patriarchal contexts the concepts of safety and protection tend to exclude women’s agency. Yet many communication stories celebrate safe migration activities as a way of preventing human trafficking.

Implications of lesson for future programming: Unless these counter-intuitive myths are understood, communication will tend to strengthen the very myths the programmes debunk. The policy brief on anti-trafficking lists several of them. Sensitizing staff and partners about these issues is a prerequisite for good communication.
Work in Freedom

Work in Freedom is an integrated development cooperation programme aiming to reduce vulnerability to trafficking and forced labour of women migrating to garment and domestic work. The programme works along migration pathways in India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Jordan and Lebanon. Interventions focus on promoting mobility by choice, fair recruitment to decent jobs and safety and dignity for migrant workers. The ILO Work in Freedom programme is supported by UKaid from the Department for International Development. However, the views expressed in this brief do not necessarily reflect the department’s official policies.

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